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# Editorial

This issue consists of six articles are from the lived experiences of the authors mostly and some are their research works which are also related t the Indian realities today. The pandemic has blocked everyone into a confined place and the context was also not favourable to express themselves. It was with much struggle they could find resources to contribute in the form of articles/ essays. The first essay "Caste Identity and Paul", by Dias Rajasekaran looks at the issue of Caste Identity in the context of Tamil Nadu and how does the caste issue is integrally part of religion. On basis of caste, he brings various discriminations within the fold of the church and the identity of a person is being questioned. Paul the great evangelist also did struggle with such issue in the church. Hence he tries to look into the NT church and the crisis that occurred during Paul's time and how does Paul deal with it is deliberated.

In the second essay "The Position of Women in William Carey's Bengali Folktales: A Feminist Historiographical Reading" by Palash Day delves into folklores written by William Carey and in this study he tries to find out the way of bringing women's position in Carey's writings with feminist perspective historically. There are 150 folktales all together, called *Itihasmala* or 'a collection of stories in the Bengali language collected from different sources.' The stories did not spread for some unknown reasons. Therefore he tries to deal with it. The tales carry the moral values of the society. The painful pictures of women and their position have been depicted in most of the stories which reflect the status of women in Bengal. Folk literature is an important part of Bengali literature; and takes a keen interest to bring out the position and status and roles of women and their struggles. Through this study,

an effort is been made to bring out the past history and roles of women which are not been clearly known to the present context.

The third essay is "Biblical Interpretation in View of Covid-19: Plague in the Gospel Accounts" by Neisabeinuo Sopfii. Covid 19 pandemic has challenged as well as brings new opportunity to look afresh at the biblical texts. This essay deals generally with the interpretation of Biblical texts in view of this pandemic mainly in the Gospel accounts to see how this issue can be addressed from Christian perspective. She goes back to the plague in the Bible and tries to understand how the situation of plague has understood and the meaning of it been imparted to us. One comes across many videos saying that Covid-19 is a warning sign of the end time; the signs of divine wrath; or the consequences of violations of natural laws. It is the end time, the fulfillment of 666, and China is branded as anti-Christ/Christian because of their anti-Christian attitude and activities; it is God's punishment for the sinful people. Covid-19 brings many new issues, challenges, and also opportunities to re-examine one's journey of faith. Hence it is an introspection of faith journey of people and to look at the pandemic biblically through the experience of the faith community.

The fourth essay "Human Suffering and the Pain of God: A Case of Child Sexual abuse" Vinod Shemron S explores the suffering of people and pain of God through a case study. Sexual assault and harassment are alarming and increasing day y day. The essay highlights the sexual abuse and the pan of children who are innocent and being undergone the heinous act of elderly or by the adults brings many questions before us. Children are powerless under the domination of the perpetrators, to escape from the abusers. Lockdown frustration as an important reason for such abuse of children. Children of broken homes and separated from their parents look for love from others, being cheated. Children are vulnerable and can be cheated easily by an adult for money or sweets and chocolates or anything small. When human suffers God suffers along with them. Ulrich Eibach maintains that "a



God who cannot suffer cannot be close to the suffering creature." Jürgen Moltmann argues that "the one who cannot suffer cannot love either." It is best to learn to speak of God's relation to human suffering by considering first the event of the suffering and death of God's Son. Hence Vinod brings various questions to be dealt with along with the suffering of people and pain of God through his essay.

The fifth essay "Ideologies of Savarkar, Hedgwar, and Golwalkar: A Citizen's view" by Alan Varghese brings a relevant topic which is seriously talked about within India and how this subject has been looked at a citizen's perspective. Hindutva ideology by Savarkar, Hedgwar and Golwalkar are the stalwarts of Hindutva ideology and the historical development of the ideology has been traced out here. He brings out how Savarkar's ideology of nationalism has led the other leaders to keep the momentum of Hindu national feeling in them and promote the nationhood and how a citizen is counted within India. He says 'to form a nation-idea, country, race, religion, culture, and language must exist unavoidably.' Hindu majority India needs to listen to the concern of minority. Indian nationalism and Hindutva ideology be looked into pluralistic and citizen's point of view so that others' culture, language and the identity be affirmed along with the majority in India. He also brings the struggle of the citizens if the Savarkarian, Hedgewarian, and Golwalkarian ideology is implemented, the nation will be divided in terms of religion, ethnicity, and even language.

The sixth essay "A Critical Appraisal of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Theological Method and its Application to the Revision of a Classical Concept of God" by Wandahilin Kharlukhi explores Rosemary Ruether's theological method to revisit the classical concept of God. Ruether makes use of women's experience of domination as the norm of her theological thinking, she affirms 'an inclusive humanity' that include genders, all social groups and races, as her critical principle. She deals with theological

methods such as dialectic method, the Prophetic Principle of dialectic method, Ruther's Method of Critical Principle and Women's Experience. Feminists' use of "women experience" for constructing her feminist theology is also questioned and challenged by poststructuralist theologian. Also she delves into the theological method of Ruether to reconstruct the image of God, the problem of the patriarchal language of God and she suggests inclusive language. Also Ruether's primary goal is to discover a nondualistic model of God. Beside that she brings out Ruether's idea of transcendent-immanent (the otherness and nearness) God concept of God. She reveals the feminist image of God in Goddess tradition. It is quite clear from her writings that Ruether's proposal of language for God as male and female to challenge the excessive androcentric representation in Christian tradition is significant because it calls for an experience of human fullness and divine mystery.

**Aswathy John**
Editor

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# Caste Identity and Paul

***A. Dias Rajasekaran****

## 1. Introduction

The theme of caste and Christianity raises the broader issue of the relationship between caste and religion, each in itself a difficult term. Indian caste system is a complex social structure wherein social roles like one's profession became 'hereditary,' resulting in restricted social mobility and fixed status hierarchies. The idea that caste is a matter of religion, that it is a Hindu institution if not a part of Hinduism, has had extraordinary influence. There are discriminations in the basis of caste system. The same kind of struggle also found in the New Testament times and Paul addresses it in various occasion. Hence this paper is a study of the Caste identity in India and the struggles of the people, Church's condition towards this evil and tries to bring out application from the Theology of Pauline writings.

## 2. The Complexity of Human Identity

Human identity is very complex. While modern science can explain human identity based on the theory of evolution, religions cannot. Science reduces the human being to its anatomy. Anatomy itself is an act of dividing anything, corporeal or intellectual for examining its parts. As a result, in the modern scientific age there are many reasons and opportunities for people to lose their identities as individuals. However, one's physical relationships comprised of food, clothing, housing, as well as geography, determines one's

* Mr. Dias Rajasekharan is a fresh M.Th (NT) graduate who completed his course and waiting for his result.

identity. Likewise, one's family, friends, community, government, managers and co-workers as well as enemies also contribute to one's identity. Modern science as well as materialism cannot exclude these factors.

Even so, Semitic religions do not advocate evolutionary theory for understanding humans or the world. Almost all religions treat humans as individual persons with unique personalities and characteristic features. In religions humans are significantly important beings compared with other living beings. In some religions, such as Judaism and the Christian faith, the human being is considered as the crown of creation. In Hindu religions such as Saivaism and Vaishnavism, humans have unique identity with God. For the most part, in all religions, humans are considered not to have evolved, but to be created and sustained by a personal God. A human being is a person, which is an idea deriving from the concept of the existence of a personal God, and is therefore capable of making conscious moral choices. Hence, religion and culture provide people stand for their identity.

In the context of India, culture and religion overlap. While cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture. In India groups could refer to people groups, castes, clans, tribes, extended families, kulam (A Kula is defined as a group of people belonging to the same God (Kula — Devta) and following similar rituals) and kothrams (Gotra is considered to be equivalent to lineage). Culture refers also to the religious customs, rituals, practices, languages (sacred/secular), values and world-views that define social groups, such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. Therefore, for Indians, cultural identity such as Dalit, Dravidian, Aryan, etc. are important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others.[1]

## 3. Caste System in India

People in general belong to many social categories that could either be achieved, such as one's profession, or inherited, such as one's gender. The consequences of social categorizations are often not only seen in the dynamics of social interactions, but also in the way, social status is represented. For the present research, the Indian/Hindu caste system is of interest, which is an integral feature of the Indian societal structure. The caste system provides a hierarchy of social roles that hold inherent characteristics and, more importantly, remain stable throughout life. An implicit status is attached to one's caste, which historically changed from the social roles to hereditary roles. This, created status hierarchies on hereditary basis with limited social mobility. For instance, individuals born into the highest caste, that is, the *Brahmin* caste have usually been priests and scholars. Individuals born into the *Kshatriya* caste have been warriors and kings. Individuals born into the *Vaishya* caste have been merchants. Finally, individuals born into the *Shudra* caste have been labourers. Besides, there was an additional 'out-casted' group called the *Dalits* or the 'untouchables' who occupied the lowest step of the social ladder.[2] In modern India, the Indian government introduced a categorization scheme in which the untouchable castes were categorized as scheduled castes (SC), the backward tribes were categorized as scheduled tribes (ST) and the disadvantaged castes as other backward castes (OBC). The Forward caste (FC) community generally constitute the high caste group. The SC, ST, and OBC comprising the historically disadvantaged groups, were provided job opportunities by the government through affirmative action.[3] The FC has historically been and, continues to be, in a strong socioeconomic position with the highest status in society. Thus, one of the main objectives of the present research was to examine how status is cognitively represented in the Indian society because of the way caste is perceived. Even now, people in India continue to define their self-identity by means of the caste they belong to and the social group that they find themselves in. Caste membership is thus imbedded in the society and there is considerable reason to claim that caste, as a type of social identity

would probably be one of the most salient identities in the Indian context.[4]

### 3.1. Caste Pride & Discrimination

Caste identity gives the 'high castes' a sense of pride, inherited privilege, power and status.[5] Before conversion to Christianity, the untouchables of Tamil Nadu had a poor self-image. For instance the Nadars and Paraiyas were described by the upper caste Hindus as untouchables, a polluting class, outcastes, panchamas (fifth caste), Paraiyas, Shanars, Illapajathi (lowest caste), Kalla (thieves), panaiyeri (Palmyra tree climbers), and so on. They were identified as people who were not entitled to receive mantras, Brahminical prayers, and were denied access to the Vedas and Scriptures. They did not worship Hindu gods, nor were they served by Brahmins or had any Brahmin priest at all. Moreover, they had no access to the interior of ordinary Hindu temples. They had come to accept that they were nobody. They came to believe what they had been told so often that they were untouchables who were fit only for slavery and servitude. These are examples of what created the negative identity that the Brahminical Hindu social order had given to the Dalits. Furthermore, they were a people who could not secure profitable and dignified jobs. Unable to own land they were forced to be content with hard and sometimes dirty and degrading labour. They were illiterate because they were denied education. This was always controlled by Brahmins and the upper castes. They were forced to develop their own social customs and manners which were not consistent with the accepted social behaviour of the upper-caste society.[6]

### 3.2. Prisoners of Social Structures

Caste, poverty and religiosity are the three main factors, which play a vital role in affecting the life of the people in India and in determining the role and function of each Indian. Among these, caste has a prime role to play in specifying the status of



each person by one's birth. The contempt and humiliation was legitimized by the Hindu Code of Law called Manusmriti which provided each caste with an identity. Manu wrote,

> Give a name to a Brahmin which invokes in others the idea of reverence and respect; give a name to a Kshatriya which invokes in others valour and courage; give a name to a Vaishya which invokes in others the idea of wealth and prosperity; give a name to a Sudra which invokes in others the idea of contempt and humiliation.[7]

Hence, it is obvious that while all other castes were given an identity, the so-called panchamas or fifth caste were not given an identity at all in the Brahminical social order. Wherefore, if an untouchable tried to lead a life with human dignity and honour it would be looked upon as an act of rebellion, and an issue of law and order.[8]

The braminical tradition designates the minority, powerful high caste people to rule over the majority, powerless low caste through its caste hierarchical system. Dalits are the people who struggle for a real and decent human life within a lifelong imprisonment of the caste hierarchical society. They painfully experience impoverishment, lack of freedom and recognition as human person, bondage, always watched, controlled, used, tortured, threatened and treated as animals. Their life is always at stake. All through their life, they are kept in physical and mental agony due to the oppression and exploitation by the powerful caste groups. In short, Dalits are a typical marginalised group of India, characterized by convergence of multiple marginalities and cumulative inequalities.

The laws of Manu reveal the caste arrogance of a high caste over the lowest casts. Such laws are religiously coloured and imposed on the oppressed. Hinduism helps to create an understanding that "untouchability is a notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and ways and means of getting rid of

that defilement"[9] The theory of pollution has a highly religiously flavoured caste character created by Brahminism.

The imposed rigid caste system in India divided the people hierarchically into high and low, pure and impure, powerful and powerless. The vast majority of people were being discriminated against and thrown out to the periphery of the society, and were reduced to the status of outcastes and untouchables! Such an unjust social institution was legitimately sanctioned and justified by Hinduism in India.

### 3.3. The Church and Casteism

The Church had accepted the same unjust hierarchical caste system and was able to tolerate it without seriously questioning the insidious practice against the dignity and equality of men. The Indian Church consists of 24 million Christians. This includes 3 million tribals and 15 million Adi Tamils, Adi Andhras, Adi Karnatakas, and this fifteen million Christian Dalits forms part of the 155 million Dalits of India. Out of the total number of Catholics in Tamil Nadu (26,78,640), 65% are Dalits (17,41,116) according to the TNBC, 1988 and they are facing discrimination based on their caste identity. Such as

3.3.1. The construction of two chapels, one for non-Dalits and the other for Dalits. In some parishes liturgical services are conducted separately.

3.3.2. Separate seating arrangement within the same chapel. Dalits are usually seated at the two aisles. Even if there are benches or chairs, the Dalits are required to be seated on the floor.

3.3.3. The operation of two separate queues to receive the Sacred Body of Christ. In some places, the Dalits are required to receive communion only after the non-Dalits have done so.

3.3.4. The existence of two separate cemeteries and two separate hearses to carry the dead.



These are some of the problems faced by the dalit Christians within the church.[10]

### 4. Social Hierarchy in the Roman Society

The Roman Empire was organized into provinces and client kingdoms. Provincial governors were Roman men of senatorial or equestrian rank sent out for a limited term to govern the province in the interests of Rome. The governance of such provinces did not require a standing army stationed in the province. Provinces of a more volatile disposition and on the borders of the empire were governed by a legate or prefect of equestrian rank supported by one or more legions permanently stationed in the province.[11] The elite classes that ruled the empire, including the emperor and the imperial family, the senatorial and equestrian orders, and the curial classes in the empire's many cities, depended on the production of their estates for the revenues that maintained their social and political privileges.[12]

The patriarchal hierarchical nature of Roman society is evident in its social structure.[13] In the Roman world, most people lived as subordinate and dependent members of a household with an in–principle–hereditary–male–head (*oikodespotes* or paterfamilias) who had comprehensive legal powers over family members, employed retainers, and slaves.[14] The social relations and social structure of the Roman world of the first two centuries of the Empire also showed little change. Social stratification continued to be a prominent feature of Roman society.[15] Years of warfare during the expansion of the Roman Empire resulted in an influx of wealth that created a group of "new men" who moved from lower to upper strata. The association of household management with stability of state, the importance of subordination of the lower parties of the *dyads* for the prosperity of household, and the moral values of modesty of women all indicate the far-reaching power of the unwritten laws. The submissiveness of the inferior parties of the *dyads* was assumed. As the early Christian church emerged, they must

have been familiar with written and unwritten laws regarding household management.[16]

## 5. Identity Issues During Paul's Time

Paul wanted his recipients to know the doctrine of *soteriology* (Doctrine of Salvation) as the gospel of Christ.[17] He also wanted to explain the relationship between Jew and Gentile in God's overall plan of redemption. Since the Jews followed their laws and the sacred days, the gentiles rejected them and hence Paul wanted to unite them all in Christ. In addition, the Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean as they were uncircumcised and they were unhappy with the Gentiles in the church. There existed a social order with the existence of slavery as well.[18] Paul wanted to encourage people to have a good relationship between Jews and Gentiles and Paul urged his audience to participate fully in God's harvest of all people.[19]

## 6. Paul's Teaching

Paul wanted equality for all Christians and he wrote about this in his letters. Paul evokes the union in Christ and unity as Christians as the basis of ultimate identity and destiny shaped not by physical birth but by a shared spiritual rebirth. And he used some of the following arguments to bring that equality in the churches.

### 6.1. God Does Not Show Partiality

An eternal truth is that as God deals in condemnation without favoritism, likewise He deals in salvation without favoritism. Respect of persons (*prosōpolēmpsia,*"lifting the face") simply means partiality. God is impartial because He does not change His pattern "to the Jew first," whether righteousness or unrighteousness is involved.[20] Paul's description of God's wrath has in view humankind as a whole, Jew as well as Greek. Here it has been more clearly implied that not only the Jew stands under God's judgment, but also that he stands in the first rank of those who are to be judged. Those who follow the law will be judged based on the law.[21] Jewish priority (in the history of salvation) is also a priority in judgment first to receive God's wrath as well as first to receive his blessing. As far as judgment is concerned, Jewish priority does not mean a priority of privilege. As Paul points out God has no favourites (Rom 2:11); he shows no partiality between Jew and Gentile.[22]

Unfortunately, there are a lot of partiality among humans, even in the best of courts, but there will be none in God's Day of Judgment. Because of His perfect knowledge of every detail and because of His perfect righteousness, it is not possible for His justice to be anything but perfectly impartial. Such things as position, caste, community, education, influence, popularity, or physical appearance will have absolutely no bearing on God's decision concerning a person's eternal destiny.[23] Therefore, God does not favour one person over another. For those who have been born again, they are all His children and as such, they are all going to inherit eternal life.

### 6.2. New Identity in Christ

"Neither Jew nor Greek" depicts the key distinction among humans from the Jewish perspective: between those who were chosen to be God's people and all others. "Greek" is basically equivalent to "Gentile" in Paul's vocabulary. In terms of origin, the verse is usually linked to a baptismal context.[24] The claim that distinctions between Jew and Greek had been erased in Christ is key to Paul's argument in Galatians, undercutting the agitators' insistence on law obedience, and is thus perfectly fitting in this context. Paul's claim that believers who have been baptized into Christ "have put on" Christ is probably part of the traditional complex of ideas that Paul is working with in this passage. However, since "slave" and "free" are found in other parallel texts, (1 Corinthians 12:13, Colossians 3:11) it could be that Paul includes the removal of distinction within the two most important social classes in the Roman Empire simply because he is following the tradition.[25]

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul utilizes a Haustafeln[26] discussing three pairs of relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters (Ephesians 5:22–6:9).[27] Masters, who are just. He mentions first, what is just, by which term he expresses that kindness, as to which he has given injunction in this Epistle (Ephesians 6:8). But as masters, looking down as it were from aloft, despise the condition of servants, so that they think that they are bound by no law, Paul brings them under control, because both are equally under subjection to the authority of God. Hence that equity of which he mentions, and mutual equity. Some understand it otherwise, but Paul here employed *ἰσότητα* to mean analogical or distributive right, as in Ephesians, *τὰ αὐτὰ,* (the same things.) For masters have not their servants bound to them in such a manner as not to owe something to them in their turn, as analogical right to be in force among all ranks.[28] The preceding argument still leaves the modern reader with a business organizational chart that assumes patriarchy and slavery. At this point a second hermeneutical move must be made: one must distinguish between what Christians did and advocated in the short term and what Christians achieved and are achieving over the long haul. Neither Paul nor Peter advocated the destruction of the Roman social order and its replacement by another. A thorough understanding of how individuals were subject to overlapping categories of identity and how they, especially as slaves, could live out multiple identities, can help us to appreciate the nature of household code discourse as highly idealized discourse.[29]

### 6.3. Breaking Down the Wall – Erasing Enmity

For centuries, there had been bitterness and tension between Jews and Gentiles, mainly because of the way proud Jews looked down on Gentiles. Jews had circumcision as the sign that they were God's people; Gentiles did not. Because they were not God's people, Gentiles enjoyed none of Israel's privileges through the covenants and promises. They had no hope for a Messiah and no knowledge of God (11–12). The Jews, having



been chosen to receive God's law, considered themselves close to God but the Gentiles far from him. They did not even allow Gentiles into the holiest part of the temple. It was as if a solid wall separated the two.[30] This alludes to a wall in the temple that partitioned off the Court of the Gentiles from the areas accessible only to Jews. Paul referred to that wall as symbolic of the social, religious, and spiritual separation that kept Jews and Gentiles apart.[31] The "middle wall of separation" refers to the Mosaic Law, but may be symbolized by the wall in the temple, which separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews the wall beyond which no Gentile was permitted to pass. Stone markers, engraved in Hebrew and Greek, warned Gentiles against crossing the line on pain of death.[32]

God had put a difference between Jews and Gentiles so that His purposes in salvation might be accomplished. However, once those purposes were accomplished, there was no difference. In fact, it was His purpose that these differences be obliterated forever, and they are eliminated through reconciliation[33] by the blood of Christ (2:13–16). He showed how believing Gentiles had entered into the family of believing Israel by faith, so that there was, as a result, one people of God united in the one body of Christ.[34] That peace has its source in, or, even stronger, is embodied in Christ.[35] Here peace is reconciliation, the abolition of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles, so us is inclusive.[36]

It was this lesson that was so difficult for the early church to understand. For centuries, the Jews had been different from the Gentiles in religion, dress, diet, and laws. Until Peter was sent to the Gentiles (Acts 10), the church had no problems. However, with the salvation of the Gentiles on the same terms as the Jews, problems began to develop. The Jewish Christians reprimanded Peter for going to the Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11), and representatives of the churches gathered for an important conference on the place of the Gentiles in the church (Acts 15). Must a Gentile become a Jew to become a Christian? Their conclusion

was, "No! Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way—by faith in Jesus Christ." The enmity was gone![37] This identification of Christ with the blessings of salvation that he brings can be found in other places in the Pauline corpus (1 Cor 1:30; Col 1:27; 3:4).[38]

The cause of that enmity was the Law, because the Law made a definite distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The dietary laws reminded the Jews that God had put a difference between the clean and unclean (Lev. 11:44–47). However, the Gentiles did not have these laws; therefore, they were unclean. Ezekiel the prophet reminded the priests that their task was to teach the Jews "the difference between the holy and the profane" (Ezek. 44:23). The divine ordinances given by God to Israel stood as a wall between the Jews and the other nations[39] but Christ, through his death broke down this wall, abolished the offensive law and commandments, destroyed the hatred and made peace.[40]

## 7. Identity in Christ & Application to Caste

Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."[41] "In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile."[42] So also is Christ; for in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews, whether Gentiles, whether bondmen, whether freemen. In all three of these passages, we see the reference both to "Jew and Gentile" and to "bondman and freeman." The particular mention of these two forms of outward classification was suggested by the circumstances of the Christian Church generally at that time. Paul is talking about the full equality of Humanity, in other words in Christ there is no discrimination based on Caste, Race and Gender, as he/she is a new creature. Christian life and witness is expected to be radically different from others' view and way of life. The visible expression of this oneness is – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism and one God. While the Brahmanic ethics emphasized the graded differences in the society anchored on discrimination and fake unity, the ethics of Jesus Christ offers equality of all. Whatever their social status may be, there is an authentic unity and oneness of humankind. The marginalised are for a genuine unity of the society, provided they are not enslaved. Moreover, this is what the ethics of Jesus Christ offers – the emancipation and liberation of all.[43] Paul concludes that the gospel of salvation by grace through faith treats all people equally: "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith." Both Jews and Gentiles receive God's gift by believing the gospel. Paul's conclusion is having an ethnic equality in itself.



## 8. Conclusion

The committed Christians involved in the struggle of Dalits for justice and identified with his/her struggling brothers and sisters even as God is involved in history, as Jesus has identified himself with humankind.[44] The Indian Christians have learned to compromise with the two obvious contradictions: being Christian and being casteist. The Church, which claims its roots from the life, actions and values of Jesus, has aligned itself with the upper castes and for centuries, has created polices that justify and maintain the unjust caste hierarchical system. The practice of Casteism is an outright denial of the presence of God in humanity and especially in the Church. Dalits have been burnt by the motives namely, caste, selfish motives, wealth, institutions, power, pride, possessions etc. This context urges the church to remove these barrios to do justice to Dalit Christians. The emerging Dalit movements make the oppressed become more human through their liberative struggles. That makes them be awakened and have a strong determination to resist any sort of dehumanization. The process of humanization of dalits and the dalitization of non-dalits that is, to feel one with and to struggle with the dalits. The unity we have in Christ should have consequences in the social world. Slave-owners and slaves have equal status with God, and that should affect the way that they treat each other. If slave-owners realized that believing slaves

were family members whom they should love as themselves, then the slave-owners would free the slaves. A person's status in the church should not be limited by the status an unbelieving society puts upon them. Today the Church has to join hands with the emerging peoples' movements like Dalit Christian Liberation Movement, Secular Dalit Movement etc., to make their vision into practice.

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# The Position of Women in William Carey's Bengali Folktales: A Feminist Historiographical Reading

***Rev. Palash Day***

## Introduction

William Carey's Bengali folktales were printed at Serampore Mission Press in 1812 and these were collected from different sources, and written in Bengali language.[1] There are 150 folktales all together, called *Itihasmala*[2] or 'a collection of stories in the Bengali language collected from different sources.' The stories did not spread for some unknown reasons.[3] Some assumed that the book store room which was completely burned down in the month of March in 1812 had destroyed all[4] because some of the stories were presenting the society from a critical perspective.[5] The *Itihasmala* is the first folk-collection in the world.[6] The tales carry the moral values of the society. The painful pictures of women and their position have been depicted in most of the stories which reflect the status of women in Bengal. Folk literature is an important part of Bengali literature; it is known as folklore or oral tradition. It contains prose, verse narratives, poems, songs, myths, legends, epics, fables, charms rituals, proverbs, riddles and the like.[7] It creates deep feelings and emotions in the hearts and minds of readers to know society and lifestyles in the past. These are all primarily women's tales. The women are almost never shown as active protagonists in control of their own lives and destinies in the tales. They were placed in the four walls of a house with covering veil as male's property and sex object. Women are always portrayed in relation to men as mother,



wife or daughter or sister, not as individual, as if they somehow belonged to men as properties. The women who aspired for power are typically represented in Carey's folktales as evil witches, ghosts, and fearsome demonisers. The malevolent, evil women are represented as wicked stepmothers, vain daughters, and cruel sisters, dominating wives, plotting aunts or demons, ghosts and other female supernatural beings.[8] Therefore, when a woman shows passive obedience as a wife and gives birth to children, she is appreciated by society but when, as tales shows, the same woman desires to have control over her own life, she becomes a threat to the society as an evil demoness to be destroyed. So, William Carey's Bengali folktales play significant roles to know the status of women in Bengal. Now we will evaluate the position of women in William Carey's Bengali Folktales through a brief sketch of feminist historiography.

## 1. Understanding of Feminist Historiography

Throughout the writing of history though women have been contributing along with men in the making of history, women's contributions are not recognized and the benefits goes to men alone. Whereas in reality women and men have both been active participant in every aspects of human history. The reason behind the unrecorded history of women was that women were characterized by men as weak, inferior, less intelligent being etc. Women experiences were considered as minor. Thus, the writing of history has been biased towards women. Therefore, feminist historiography is one of the methods of study to rediscover women's role and contributions in history of the world today. The term 'feminism' was coined in the late nineteenth century. Hubertine Auclert, the first person to use the term in 1882 to name the struggle of women in gaining political rights.[9] Feminism is a social vision, rooted in women's experience of sexually based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking the liberation of women from all forms of sexism and an academic method of analysis being used in virtually every discipline.[10] The

primary concern for feminist efforts should be to end patriarchal domination.[11] According to Immanuel David, "Feminism in its narrow sense is a reaction against discrimination of women in church and society, and in its broader sense feminist seeks to understand human existence in a manner that gives equal weight to female experience."[12] Joann Wolski Conn stated that feminism is both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action, rooted in women's critical awareness of how a culture is controlled in meaning and action by men.[13]

According to feminist historians and scholars like Barbara Mac Haffie and Narola Imchen, the recorded and interpreted history of the past of the human race is only a partial record. As a result, all history has been 'his stories' though both men and women have been active participants in history, and have shared the world and its work equally.[14]

Woba James citing the view of feminist theologians like Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza asserted that women are not simply 'a-historical' being, but have significant history which makes a difference, they are not simply historical facts but responders to and creators of facts who are constantly involved with the events in their lives. James further agreeing along with Rosemary Radford Ruether and states that traditional text always treated women at the periphery, therefore, new texts need to be found and used so that women's history can be visible to others. A paradigm shift in theology, writing and reading history with critical questioning of the authoritative text, and challenging the past and present traditions which limited women's full humanity is required.[15]

V. V. Thomas stated that one of the major assumptions in modern research is that history written in the past mostly by 'men' need to be re-written and re-read in order to render justice especially to women who were always the victims of a male-dominated society. There are neglected areas and characters that history need to reconsider again. History remains incomplete when one part of the fact is ignored. In the light of such an



incomplete history, feminist historiography came forward to influence historical research since the last decade.[16] The task of feminist historiography is to point out the andocentric scholarly evaluation of historical literatures.[17]

On the other hand, we can't understand clearly the feminist historiography without understanding of Patriarchy. What is patriarchy? The term patriarchy defines a "culture in which men exercise control over women, and restrict women's freedom of choice, behavior, action, and thought, placing women in a position of subservience and dependency on men."[18] Patriarchy literally means the rule of the fathers, but in practice, it means institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family as well as in the society in general.[19] Natalie K. Watson further explained,

> Patriarchy constructs a social-symbolic order in which men dominate women and women are viewed as the other: as those who do not fit the criteria of normative existence. Patriarchy is a system, a web of relationships and institutions that not only refers to relationships between men and women, but arranges the whole of life, and all forms of relationships in a hierarchical way. Patriarchal interest within Christian Theology and Praxis has rendered women invisible in both church and theology.[20]

Limatula Longkumer has said that under the influence of patriarchy, the historiographers have distorted and misinterpreted and women had almost lost their stories and roles from the main stream of history.[21] Gerda Lerner argued that patriarchy is a historic creation by men and women, which took form through a process of long years.[22] Patriarchy denies women's access to public and limits her role and participation. History has been written from such a patriarchal context therefore it is no wonder that women lost their history.

Wang asserts that woman should write their own 'herstory' instead of just retelling the written history meaning the meaningful connectedness of women's stories as told by women. The language of herstory could be different from the conventional history. In the reconstruction of history, women are no longer nameless. They are not just victims of the structures of domination, but their story of oppression have become a part of herstory writer which is their power and strength to uncover, to reveal and to give birth to a new generation and a new world.[23]

The method of recovery can be used to draw out women's stories though their writings contributed to journals, memoirs, autobiographies, letters, private diaries etc. these things will reflect their own version of ideas and self perceptions. Personal interviews can be done to obtain insights into women's evaluation of their own lives and relationships.[24] V. V. Thomas quoting Trible's view, points out that, "I affirm that the intentionality of biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men,"[25] According to Limatula Longkumer, by going back to our own traditional stories and folklore and retelling them from the perspective of women, the roles played by women in the past may be discovered and those values may help us to rediscover a new vision for our society. There are liberative elements in traditional stories myths, poems, songs and folklore which can be used a source of inspiration to regain women's rights, dignity, value and status in society.[26]

Now let us see how the language in religion is biased by patriarchy. Language is a medium of communication; it is a powerful tool to liberate as well to discriminate people; it can be words that are written and spoken. The language used in the description, image, picture and symbols about God is exclusive in male terms, this is because Christian theology has been shaped and written by men.[27]



Religions centered on the worship of a male God create moods and motivations that keep women in a state of psychological dependency on men and male authority. In the Bible God said, "Let us make humankind in our own image according to our likeness . . ." (Gen. 1:26).[28] Here the word 'our' reminds the significant role of woman. The patriarchal linguistic domination in the Bible as 'Father,' 'King,' 'Warrior,' 'Shepherd,' 'Husband,' 'Christ,' 'Word of God'/'Logos,' 'Son of God,' 'Son of Man,' 'Messiah,' 'Lion of Judah,' 'Prince,' 'New Adam,' '*Imago dei'*/'Mission of God' etc., are the names and metaphors in worship in hymns and Scriptures is dominated by male.[29] In other hand, there are the bright examples of female images of God in the Bible as 'Christa', sculpted by Edwina Sandys.[30] The Hebrew word *El Shaddai* means "God almighty." The most likely grammatical derivation of *Shaddai* is from the Hebrew word *Shad,* meaning "breast". A literal translation of *El Shaddai* may be "God of breasts" or "breasted God."[31] Prophet Hosea who boldly pictures God as husband also gives us a tender picture of God as nurturing mother (Hos. 11:3,4). The love of God is seen in providing of nourishment like a human mother bending down to feed her child at her breast.[32] The Hebrew word *ruach* can be translated as "breath," "wind" and "spirit." The Spirit of God in the Bible is a female, life-giving, empowering, and educational presence. In the Wisdom tradition, divine Wisdom (Prov. 1:20; 8:1-21, 1 Cor. 1:23, 24) is imagined as female. *Hokmah*, the Hebrew word for "Wisdom" is grammatically feminine. Elizabeth Johnson agrees, "As Sophia incarnates Jesus . . . can be thought of a revelatory of the graciousness of God imagined as female."[33]

Manohar quoting an African theologian Mercy Amba Odyoye stated that "woman fall victim to linguistic imagery that socialize them to accept their place in society and to view with cautious any call for more space."[34] Feminist critique has focused on the idea that God is imagined as male and so men are seen as able to represent God, while women are not able to represent

God.[35] Masculine language, concept and symbols about God are imposed in the translations and in reading the Bible. Metaphors use to name God is masculine; God is portrayed as master, father, king etc. which has serious effect on women. Though there are some feminine qualities of God portrayed in the Bible, it has been overlooked and ignored because of patriarchy.[36] Exclusive language attributes maleness to God; many hymns address the congregation as brothers or men, worship too often in male language, preaching and teaching, so feminist are very critical about exclusive language.[37]

Feminist studies maintains that the established scholarship is biased, to the extent that its intellectual discourse are determined and defined from male perspectives. Feminist historian seek to find feminist meaning in the andocentric record by re-appropriating the patriarchal past for those who have not only suffered its pain of oppression but also participated in its social transformation and development. In the feminist reading of biblical texts and the reconstruction of their historical-social worlds, there is a need to utilize all available historical theological tendencies and rhetorical aims of the redactional process of the history of tradition. The silences of the texts about women must be broken to derive meaning from androcentric historiography and narrative. The androcentric text must be understood as social construction by men and for men. And read their silences as indication of the historical reality of women.[38] Reinterpretation of history will not hide women or make men invisible, but integrate all men and women.

One of the major assumptions today among the readers and writers is that history written in the past generally by men. It will have to be re-read to render justice to all sections of the society and to women who were the victims of a patriarchal society. Feminist historiography is the development from the effort of women, who realized the injustice done to them and thus fearlessly raise their voice against the patriarchal structure of society that limited their



freedom. Women cannot afford such an historical or anti-historical stance because it is preciously the power of oppression that deprives people of their history. Therefore, feminist historiography has questioned the recorded history of the past and brought to the front that history has been partial to women, and history needs to be reconstructed and reinterpreted in feminist perspective, to fully understand what really happened in the past. It asserts that women were human as men and so marginalization of women in the history makes history invalid.

With the understanding of what feminist historiography is, the next discussion will deal with how the Bengali folktales portray the women.

Now let us see the critical evaluation on some selected folktales of Carey. The women's discriminations are mainly visible in most of the tales. There are also few tales which talk about the violence created by women. However, there are thirty nine folktales are discussed below.

## 2. The Painful Pictures of Women in William Carey's Bengali Folktales

In Carey's Bengali folktales, there are various painful pictures about women. They are discriminated socially, culturally, religiously and politically in every sectors of their life. More than thirty seven folktales talk about the women's plight. These are given below:

i. *Rakshaser dhanda, panditer samadhan*[39] (The demon's plane and the wise man's salvation)

The first tale talks about women's status. In the tale woman is treated as *Rakshasi* (demoness). The king declared to ruin the *Rakshasi* because she eats a man every day.[40] Here, the tale was composed to see patriarchy in the positive view and women in negative point of view. The term *Rakshasi* is used to picture women as wicked by males. It means that if a woman behaves wrongly,

the patriarchal society always ready to blame and even to give the name *Rakshasi*. Here, the women's status was discriminated.

ii. *Patni and upapatni*[41] (The wife and the sub-wife)

The tale talks about the important of women's status. A merchant kept his wife at home and went abroad for business. In the absence of the husband, the wife started illegal relation with a rich man's son and both started to stay together. Every day they enjoy staying in the young man's house. One day the merchant returned back. The wife became very happy getting her husband after a long time. She happily started to serve her husband and could not meet the young man. In the absence of her, the young man became very angry and forced her to murder her husband. The wife killed her husband with a knife when he was sleeping at home at night.[42] Here, we can say that the woman (wife) is a cheater, killer and *apratibrata nari*.[43] But if we see very logically the young man forced her to kill her husband. Long time after when she met her husband, she served him happily. It proved that she loved her husband. In the absence of husband she was trapped in an illegal relation. She would not kill her husband if the young man would not force her to kill him. To make him happy she became murderer. So here, the young man was the main cheater and murderer but the woman was accused.

iii. *Singhapatnir dattak putra*[44] (The adapted child of lion's wife)

In the tale, lioness' heart cries for an orphan puppy. When she saw an orphan puppy, she requested the lion (husband) to adapt it.[45] The lion's heart was not cried for the puppy but lioness's heart cried out. Here, the kindness and nobility of motherhood are depicted.

iv. *Swayenbore Rajputrer ardhasholoke uccharan*[46] (The prince's half-pronunciation in engagement)

Shasiprabha is the princess of the king Somesundar. She is very knowledgeable. Even she was gifted the special blessing by goddess *Kali*. The prince was beheaded by his own fault. But Shasiprabha begged to goddess *Kali* for prince's life.[47] As a woman, Shasiprabha came to save the prince. She travelled here and there taking the head and the dead body of the prince to make him alive. Here, the female greatness is depicted.



v. *Byaghrer bibaha*[48] (The marriage of the tiger)

Here, a tiger was caged and thrown into river by a clever *Brahmin*. The poor tiger cried for his life. A tigress broke the cage and saved him.[49] The male was saved by female. The female's braveness and strength are depicted in the tale.

vi. *Brahman paribarer borotraer byerthata*[50] (The failure of the three blessings of the Brahmin-family)

Haridutta is a *Brahmin*. He got special blessing from God. His wife became very beautiful and attractive through blessing. But the king Jaban could not control his desire. He was attracted to Haridutta's wife and took her.[51] Here, the male's fleshy desire is depicted. Beauty is the special gift from God and so male should respect and acknowledge them as mother, sister or wife. But they are not ashamed to play with the women as sexual object and their own property.

vii. *Banik kanyar sanket*[52] (The sign of merchant's daughter)

The jealous prince was attracted to the beauty of merchant's daughter.[53] It means the prince loved her beautiful body. Here, women as sexual object or male's property are depicted in the tale.

viii. *Chaturkhare pusper nam*[54] (The name of the flower in four letters)

There was a beautiful princess whose name is Sarbangasundari. The knowledgeable *mantri* (minister) was defeated by her knowledge and wisdom.[55] Here, male was defeated by female. She got fame for her wisdom. The extraordinary virtue and wisdom of female are depicted in the tale.

ix. *Hanri bhange, rani hase*[56] (The earthen vessel is broken and the queen's laughing)

The theme of the tale is very similar to a story of *Panchatantra.*[57] There was a minister who had an illegal relation with a queen. In the absence of the king, they used to meet together. One day the minister told the queen to kill the king and leave the place. After death of the king, they happily and fearlessly would be stayed together. The queen became fool by the dirty plan of the minister. She murdered the king and went to the destination where the minister waited for her. The minister was waiting under a tree. But unfortunately the minister was bitten by a poisonous snake and died there. After seeing the dead body the queen became puzzled. She left the place and started prostitution in another place. One day the prince (the queen's son) came to her for sexual relation. He did not know that with whom he enjoyed sexually, she was his own mother. The prostitute (the queen) could identify her son but she could not say that she is his mother. She took a shelter in a cow man's house and started to sell milk village to village.[58] Here, the poor woman was a queen before. But unfortunately she became a milk-woman. Generally we can blame her but the main culprit is the minister. He gave the dirty plane to the queen. Sometimes people generally blame the female but we should not forget that the male's dirty trap is one of the main causes of violence in society.

x. *Pechak o kalinga pakshi*[59] (The pigeon and the bird in Kalinga)

In the tale, a male bird (husband) was injured. His head was fractured. The female bird (wife) cried out for her husband (male-bird).[60] She could not stay happy without doing anything for her husband. Here, the wife's pure love to her husband is depicted.

xi. *Labayanavati udyane bhahamaner puspachayan*[61] (The theft of the Brahmin in the garden of Labayanavati)

The particular tale is very important because it reveals the wickedness of a *Brahmin.* Labayanavati was a woman. Her garden was filled with beautiful flower. She lived alone. The cunning



*Brahmin* everyday stole flower from her garden. Labayanavati warned him not to steal flower from her garden. But the *Brahmin* could not stop the stealing. At last Labayanavati did not warn again, rather she allowed him to collect the flower from the garden.[62] Here, she tolerated him. Labayanavati's greatness and great virtue are visible in the tale. Though the *Brahmin* was literate, but his illiterate work is visible here. Labayanavati was not literate but her literate work is depicted.

xii. *Harini badana rajakanya*[63] (The princess whose face is like a deer)

In the tale a princess' face was looked like a deer. The king was tensed for his daughter. He was very worried for his daughter's marriage.[64] Here, it is proved that society demands female's beauty for marriage. They actually marry female beauty or physical body not human. Here, the princess is not physically or sexually handicapped. She is perfectly alright for marriage. May be her face is lightly similar to deer. It does not mean she is physically looks like a deer. Instead of princess if a prince's face is defect, the king might not worry. Because society hardly blames male's physical or social defect.

xiii. *Rupabatir tinti paniprarthi*[65] (Rupavati has three bride-groom)

There was a *Brahmin* named Agniswami. His daughter was very beautiful. There were also three men ran after her for marriage.[66] Here, they were very much attracted by her physical body. They could not control their fleshy lust and ran after her. Her beauty was given by God. It was her special gift. But the three men wanted to marry her. Actually they wanted to marry her physical beauty. It is not true love. In the tale, the woman is depicted as sex object or male's property.

xiv. *Bejir mrityu, putrer rakshya*[67] (The death of Beji and the son was saved)

Here, the Brahmani (Brahmin's wife) asked her husband (Brahmin) to take care their child and went to take bath in the river. But the Brahmin told his mongoose to see the child because he had work. In the absence of them a poisonous snake came and bit the child.[68] In the tale, father gave more importance to his personal work than to look after his own child. The tale says that mother is more responsible than father.

And the second part of the tale, the merchant's doubt on his wife is visible. After doing business, the merchant returned to his home from foreign country after a long time. He saw his wife serving different delicious food to a man. Seeing the fact, the merchant became very angry and went to kill her.[69] But actually the man was the merchant's own son. During the pregnancy period of his wife, the merchant went foreign country and stayed many years. The son became a young man. We cannot imagine that how woman does suffer because of male.

xv. Shilar ozon[70] (The weight of clay)

In the tale, the Brahmin kept his pregnant wife and went to another province for income.[71] We know that income is needed to maintain the family. But during her pregnancy her husband (Brahmin) was absent. She might be very much needed for her husband for love, care and help. She did not get anything from her husband. She suffered.

xvi. Annyapatre gomai-bhasya[72] (The cow-dung ashes in the rice)

There was a queen who had lots of wisdom. The queen saved her husband (the king) by the wicked plan of enemies.[73] The tale also reminds that the woman is faithful to her husband. Here, woman's greatness, powerfulness and faithfulness are depicted.



xvii. Dui rakshaser mitrata[74] (The friendship of the two demons)

Here, the two Rakshas were impressed and burned to see the physical beauty of a girl. They ran after and disturbed her. They both wanted to marry. They started to quarrel and lost their life.[75] We cannot blame the beautiful girl or her beauty for the two Rakshas' death. They are murdered by themselves. The inocent girl was disturbed by them.

xviii. Mushiker dayai sukhsabaker raksha[76] (The Sukh baby bird becomes saved by the kindness of the mouse)

There was a Sukh and Sari birds lived in a jungle. One day the jungle got fire and Sukh bird (the father bird) left soon without thinking his baby birds and wife (Sari bird). But the Sari bird (the mother bird) did not leave the baby birds.[77] Here, she gave her life to save them. The tale talks that the father's love and care are more than father. The mother's greatness and real love are visible here.

xix. Manda buddhir swapnabhanga[78] (The dream was broken by the wicked plan)

In the tale, there was a man who wanted to sell his elephants to build a farm. After building the farm his marriage took place. The man prayed for a son because the son would take care of him and the farm in future.[79] The man did not wish a girl. It means the girl child was neglected and avoided by the society.

xx. Raksaser cheye papi ke?[80] (Who is more sinful than the demoness?)

In the tale, Rakshasi is visible. She herself expressed that she is a great sinner. She has been called as ferocious, wicked, blood-sucker, inauspicious and sinner.[81] Here, she is given the name Rakshasi by male. The very interesting thing we can see that in the folktales again and again the negative term Rakshasi is visible. The question is why not Rakshas (Male) is visible in the folktales as inauspicious, wicked, blood-sucker or sinner. The answer might be simple, the patriarchy system in society.

xxi. Byaghrir palito rajkumer[82] (The prince is reared by tigress)

Here, the king and queen were killed by an accident in a boat in the river. Anyhow the baby prince was rescued and taken care by a tigress. The baby was given milk by her.[83] In the tale, the baby got life by the tigress. There was a tiger but he did not come to help the orphan prince. The female heart cried out for the baby. In the tale, the greatness of female is depicted.

xxii. Brahman o subarna sarpa[84] (The Brahmin and the golden snake)

There was a king named Anajadrya in Mohan Nagar. A poor Brahmin was lived there. Subrata is the wife of the Brahmin. Her husband was an old and could not work. The old Brahmin was not able to run the family. One day he caught a snake and asked his wife for cooking.[85] In the tale, we can see that Subrata could not do anything without the permission of her husband. Even, she had no right to cook anything except her husband's order. She had no right to do job at outside and earn money to run family. The main reason is Subrata is a woman. The very interesting thing is visible here when the old Brahmin caught a poisonous snake and gave his wife for cooking. The wife became afraid and felt uncomfortable to cook it. But she had to obey her husband's order. The patriarchy was strictly visible in the tale. Woman had no right to say anything against husband or males. They tolerated all the injustice, pain, suffering etc. silently.

xxiii. Rajkanyar janma, mrityu vibaha[86] (The princess' birth, death and marriage)

There was a king named Chandrasekhar who worshipped the Sun god for a son.[87] Here, the patriarchy lies as rigid problem. The king did not want a daughter. It means that girl was neglected in the society. The women's discrimination is vividly visible in the tale.



xxiv. Ramoni and kanthal-chor[88] (The woman and the jackfruit-thief)

In the tale, there lived a woman who had a beautiful fruit garden. And there was a thief who everyday steals fruit from the garden. The gardener warned the thief again and again[89] The thief did not care the gardener. Because the main reason is that the gardener was a woman. The thief knew that the woman could not do anything against him. Here male's cunningness is clearly visible.

xxv. Mata kalahapriya, ghyatha bhrata bhut[90] (The quarrelsome mother and the elder brother is ghost)

Here, the woman is presented as quarrelsome. The first line is written that there was a woman who is very quarrelsome.[91] The question is why it was not written that there was a man who is very quarrelsome.

xxvi. Nagloke chatur Brahmin[92] (The clever Brahmin in the snake-kingdom)

There was a Brahmin who was very clever and cunning. He ran after the beautiful princess in the snake-kingdom. The greedy Brahmin wanted to get her.[93] In the tale, the Brahmin was attracted by the princess' physical beauty. At last the clever and cunning Brahmin fulfilled his lust. The Brahmin's cleverness, greediness and cunningness are visible. Here, the female beauty became the male's lust and object.

xxvii. Mithyabadir jinmai swarner istak[94] (The golden-vermilions are the liar's hand)

The tale talks about a widow and a wicked rich man. The widow was cheated by a rich man. There was a man who was suddenly died by an accident. The wife became widow. The widow decided to go to her father's house because her son was a child. So, she gave her two golden vermilions to a rich man in the village to keep them safely. Some years later she and her son returned back to the village and asked the rich man to get their two golden vermilions. The rich man refused to give the vermilions to the widow.[95] In the

tale, the rich man was presented as a cheater and wicked but the widow's simplicity made her win at last. Woman's greatness and simplicity are depicted in the tale.

xxviii. Lahana o khullanar kaloha[96] (The quarrelling of Lahana and Khullana)

The tale vividly talks about woman's pain, pathos and suffering. In the tale, there was a merchant named Dhanapati who married again to another woman named Khullana because his first wife Lahana was barren.[97] In the tale we can see that it was not Lahana's fault that she was barren. And it is very difficult to tolerate for a wife if husband marry for second time. Now the question can be raised that could Khullana marry again to another man if her husband Dhanapati would be barren or unable to produce child? Most probably Khullana could not do it.

xxix. Devi-rakshasir naraboli[98] (The human sacrifice of the goddess of demon)

In the tale, the Rakshasi is presented as wicked woman.[99] It means woman's status was not rich in the society. They were discriminated at random.

xxx. Pratni hattyai udyata banik[100] (The merchant is so aggressive to murder his wife)

Here, Dhanagupta was given shelter by Hiranyagupta. He was married to the daughter of Dhanagupta and stayed there. One day he took his wife and started to return to his own home. On the middle of the way, he murdered his wife and took all her ornaments. Anyhow the wife was saved by some passerby. She returned to her father's home. As she loved her husband very much she did not say anything about her husband's cunningness to her father. Even she accepted her husband when he returned again to her for money.[101] In the tale, wife's real love and forgiveness are visible.



xxxi. Dhruter chal, chorer uparichal[102] (The plan of the wicked man and the super plan of the thieves)

There were two maid servants who worked in a house. One day two thieves (Male) came to the house and murdered them at night.[103] The question might be arising that what is the reason that the thieves came to the house and murdered the both women. As the tail is one of the incomplete tails in Itihasmala it does not clearly say the reason. However, it is clear that the both maid servants were murdered by males. It might be the owner of the house, who murdered them for sexual or economical reasons. It is also clear that the patriarchal society never thinks twice to murder the women if they ask their payment or stand against sexual harassment.

xxxii. Nirbodh tatidampatir barojan pratibesi[104] (The poor weaver couple and their twelve neighbors)

There was a man who brought three fishes from market and gave his wife for cooking. The very interesting thing we can see in the tale that the man demanded to eat two fishes and one is for his wife.[105] As the man brought fishes but at the same time the wife cooked. It means both have equal roles. But the husband did not think twice to take the two fishes and one only for his wife. Therefore, in the tale, the injustice and inequality to women are visible.

xxxiii. Tapaswi rajkumar, aharnidra-birahita rajakanya[106] (The meditated prince and the crazy princess)

There was prince who is not handsome and smart who always meditated in forest like a hermit. But the princess is very beautiful. But she is tensed and worry for her marriage. Because the princess wanted a good husband who loves and care her.[107] In the tale we can see that as the prince was not handsome and smart but never worry for his marriage. He was sure that he easily could get beautiful and loyal wife because he is a male.

xxxiv. Kupe poropakari, brikshe ranir bhut[108] (The helpful man is in the pond and the queen's ghost is in the tree)

A queen was forcefully taken into a well for bathing because she was possessed by evil spirit.[109] Here, we can see that the poor queen suffers a lot. The question is why is king not possessed by evil spirit? Some of the tales of Carey present that queen; princess, daughter, wife, aunt, etc., are characters who always possessed by evil spirit. Then, they got physical and mental tortured. There a big politics of patriarchy is depicted in the tale.

xxxv. Banikpatnike shuker paramarshadan[110] (The pigeon's advice to merchant's wife)

In the tale, the pain and suffering of woman are visible clearly. There was a merchant who arranged a bird to take care his wife and went to foreign for business.[111] The wife feels lonely in the absence of her husband. The tale clearly portrays that the merchant does not care his wife. The wife suffers because of her husband.

xxxvi. Bandhur bikrai, namaz-para Brahmin[112] (The selling of the friend and Namaz recitation of the Brahmin)

A Brahmin was sold as slave by his friend. After getting freedom from slavery he came to his village and intended to see as widow of his friend's wife. The Brahmin came to his friend's house and told his friend's death news to his friend's wife. The woman started crying and left all her ornaments. The clever Brahmin sold all the ornaments and arranged his friend's Shraddha or Pinda[113] in order to recitation of Namaz by himself.[114] There was the dirty politics between two males but the poor woman became victim.

xxxvii. Krishakpatnir gananai macher hisab[115] (The measurement of fish is according to farmer's wife)

One day a farmer brought some fishes and ordered his wife for cooking. The wife was too tired after doing all the domestic works for the whole days.[116] Here, the farmer never care whether his wife



tired or not. It means he is so selfish. In the tales, the patriarchy was harshly found in the society.

The above tales talk about the women's pain, pathos and sufferings etc. The patriarchal fences and some religious laws and superstitions of Hinduism made their life so miserable, painful, half-dead and insecure are visible in the folktales. A woman, according to most authorities, was always a minor at law. According to Manu,[117] as a girl she was under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband, and as a widow, of her sons.[118] Women are symbolized as sex symbol in Hinduism. They needed for producing the child. Women are considered as field and men are considered as seed. As seed is more important for producing the child than field, male is placed in higher than female. They should be placed under male. They should be controlled by male.[119]

The Manu also says that God created women for men's helpmate, sex-partner, producing child, caring child, wearing jewels and serving all. They are specially gifted by God as weaker, incapable, ignore, greediness to jewels, jealousy, bad activities, blaming to others, interfering to other's matter, wicket and inauspicious.[120] Bhagavan.[121] Manu wrote that it is not good to give freedom to women. If they get freedom; they will become unfaithful to their duties regarding producing child, rearing child, domestic work and purity.[122] Early law-books assessed a woman's wergild as equivalent to that of a Sudra whatever her class.[123] Women are not considered as complete human like men. They are treated as male's sex partner or object and personal property. They are also not considered as equal to male. Women are given the highly certificate that they are weaker, incapable and undead. Even giving respect to women is considered as very shameful thing to male society.[124] So, religious ignorance is one of the main causes of women's pain and suffering found in the folktales.

## 3. The Painful Pictures Created by Women in William Carey's Bengali Folktales

There are also some folktales which talk about the painful pictures created by women themselves. But this type of case is very rare. However, these tales are discussed below.

i. Sarper darshan, matar prahar[125] (The snake's bite and mother's beating)

There was a woman who was very cunning and selfish. One day her daughter was bitten by a poisonous snake. Then, the women came to a poor Brahmin for treatment. The poor Brahmin treated her daughter and saved her life. But the woman did not thank him. Even, the poor Brahmin was fasting for three days but women refused to give some food also.[126] In the tale, we can see that the woman is not thankful. She did not justice to the man. She is presented as selfish, cruel and cunning.

ii. Mejo bouer ek kolsi shuai[127] (A pitcher of coin of the middle wife of the house)

There were the four brothers who lived together in a house. They all were married. One of the brother's wives stole wealth and saved money very cleverly. She became rich. She asked her husband to arrange a separate house only for her.[128] In the tale, we can see that for a woman's cunningness and selfishness the entire joint family was broken and the four brothers were divided. Here, the woman becomes the problem maker.

## Conclusion

William Carey's Bengali folktales mainly talks about women's pain, pathos, sufferings etc. The horrible patriarchy system treated women as sex-object or male's property.[129] The above thirty nine folktales very clearly talk about women's position in Bengal society. There are other folktales in Itihasmala which are not discussed here due to the page limitation. Throughout the discussion we clearly see that women are treated as sex-object or male's property. Their pain, sufferings, pathos, tolerance etc., are drawn in the tales. At the same time some violence is also created by female. But it is very few.



The patriarchal system is visible vividly in the most of the tales. It becomes a curse for women. It attacks the women's status again and again and tears their values. They hide their tears covering with long veil. They had no voice to stand for justice. Nobody was there to hear their crying. Nobody was there to stand before them. Now a day, we have feminist theology. So many feminist theologians and feminist social workers are working for women today. The important centers are opened to give justice to women. They are given many facilities in social, economical and political levels. Today the theologians think about their upliftments, justice, and equality. The valuable feminist books are written. So many institutions are opened for women's study. So today, many are there to stand before them. But before the birth of feminist theology; the situation was not like today. There was no feminist theology. There was no feminist theologian. Nobody was there to stand for women's equality and justice. Nobody was there to see their tear. But the great missionary.[130] William Carey could not stay in silence without protesting against women's injustice through his Bengali folktales (Itihasmala). One might think God had sent him at the right time to Bengal to hear His children's crying, especially the women. God is impartial. He loves all equally. He always stands for sufferers. So God protests against women's injustice using William Carey in His ministry through the Bengali folktales or Itihasmala. The folktales become the healthy components which remind the feminist theology in the 21st century. Here, Carey's Bengali folktales became the first mirror where the perfect feminist theology is visible. According to researcher, Carey's Bengali folktales or Itihasmala is the first book where he is the first feminist writer or theologian. According to Pabitra Sarkar, "The folk-literature has valuable purpose to

teach the new generation."[131] So, there is no doubt that William Carey's Bengali folktales are not exceptional.

William Carey's Bengali folktales convey the message to acknowledge women's contribution and sacrifice in the society and so the society and the family need to give sufficient respect to them. The research concludes with an expectation that the society will respect and care for women who are Ma (mother), Basumata (mother of the earth), Sohadari (sister) and Varja (wife), as they were in the eyes of William Carey. Let us salute his bequeathed legacy with reverence.

## End Notes

1 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb (Calcutta: Dasgupta and company, n.d.), 3. (Hereafter cited as Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb).

2 It is the name of the book where the 150 folktales are in the book. This is a collection of stories in the Bengali language, collected from different sources. The 150 folktales carry the various types of history. The word itihas means history and mala means collection. So it is together called Itihasmala. Cf. Isha Paul, Lokokothar meyera and annayana (Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Sansad, 2013), 10-11. (Hereafter cited as Paul, Lokokothar meyera and annayana).

3 Cf. Paul, Lokokothar meyera and annayana, 10.

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5 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 27.

6 Sukumar Sen, *Bangala sahityer itihas: tritiya khanda* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers Private Limited, 1960), 13. (Hereafter cited as Sen, Bangala sahityer itihas: tritiya khanda).

7 Cf. Palash Dey, "Carey sampadito golpe bhanglar nari," in Nabayan, edited by Suranjan Midday (Calcutta: Sahitya Sadan, 2016), 14-15.

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15 Woba James, *Major Issues in the History of Christianity in India: A Post Colonial Reading* (Jorhat: TDCC Publications, 2013), 23.

16 V. V. Thomas, "Research Methodology: History of Christianity," in Issues in Theological Research: A Methodological Exploration, edited by Wati Longchar (Bangalore: BTESSC, 2010), 18.

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18 Kenneth E. Gill, *Count Us Equal: The Ministry of Women in the CSI* (Bangalore: ATTWI, 1990), 24.

19 David, Women, *Church and Feminist Theology: A Bibliographical Guide,* 16.

20 Natalie K. Watson, *Feminist Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 27.

21 Longkumer, *Women in Theological Education: Pedagogical Issues*, 109.

22 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 212.

23 Jen-Wen Wang, "Writing our Own Herstory," in Telling Her Story: Introduction to an Asian Feminist Re-reading of History (Kaula Lumpur: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 2006), 13.

24 Christina Manohar, *Feminist Critique and Reconstruction* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 19. (Hereafter cited as Manohar, Feminist Critique and Reconstruction).

25 V. V. Thomas, *Dalit and Tribal Christians of India: Issues and Challenges* (Kerala: Focus India Trust, 2014), 149.

26 Limatula Longkumer, *Rediscovering Women's Role and Status in Society," in Transforming Theology for Empowering Women: A Theological and*

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28 Anna May Say Pa, ed., *Rise Salad Table: Myanmar Women Doing Theology Together: Feminist Theology Resources Book* (Yangon: Association for Theological Education in Myanmar, 2013), 34. (Hereafter cited as Pa, ed., Rise Salad Table: Myanmar Women Doing Theology Together: Feminist Theology Resources Book).

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31 Johanna W. H. Van Wijk Bos, *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 19950), 25-26.

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33 Pa, ed., Rise Salad Table: Myanmar Women Doing Theology Together: Feminist Theology Resources Book, 38-39.

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39 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

40 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 1.

41 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

42 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 4-5.



43 Apratibrata nari is a term used in Hindu culture and traditions to refer to a married woman who is unfaithful and disloyal to her husband, https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/pativrata (14th December, 2019).

44 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 6-7.

45 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

46 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey sahib, 32.

47 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 9-10.

48 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

49 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey sahib, 13-14.

50 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

51 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 14-15.

52 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

53 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 18-19.

54 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 32.

55 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 19.

56 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

57 Sen, Bangala sahityer itihas: tritiya khanda, 14.

58 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 26.

59 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

60 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 28-29.

61 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

62 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 30-31.

63 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

64 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 31-32.

65 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

66 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 38.

67 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

68 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 40-41.

69 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 40-41.

70 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

71 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 41-42.

72 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 33.

73 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 43-44.

74 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 34.

75 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 48.

76 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 34.

77 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 50-51.
78 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 34.
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82 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 34.
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88 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
89 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 71.
90 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
91 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 77-78.
92 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
93 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 78-79.
94 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
95 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 81-83.
96 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
97 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 83-84.
98 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 35.
99 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 85.
100 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
101 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 91.
102 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
103 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 100-101.
104 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
105 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 101-102.
106 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
107 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 104.
108 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
109 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 105.
110 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
111 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 106.
112 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.



113 Shraddha or Pinda is an offering made to the manes of any deceased person on an appointed day after his or her death. After the funeral mourners must wash and change their clothing before entering the house. Shraddha is when food is given to the poor in memory of the deceased. Shraddha lasts one month and a priest will say prayers for the deceased, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/shraddha (15th December, 2018).
114 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 107-108.
115 Cf. Dutien, ed., The itihasmala by carey saheb, 36.
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# Biblical Interpretation in View of Covid-19: Plague in the Gospel Accounts

***Neisabeinuo Sopfii***

## Introduction

The Coronavirus Pandemic has affected people all around the world and causing many uncountable deaths as well. It has affected the daily living of the people so much in many ways and confronts people with the problem of pain and suffering. It is a situation in which both the rich and the poor as well has been affected. The virus does not make distinctions of the rich or the poor. However, the poor are the ones who have suffered mostly from it. As worldwide lockdown was imposed, the poor people, the migrants and the refugees, daily wage earners, sick people and so on suffered and experience untold miseries. Discrimination was widespread among different groups of people and against one's own neighbor and friends.

As the pandemic continues, people continue to suffer. In this context, Scripture plays an important role as many questions arise as to whether this pandemic is a blessing or a curse from God. The pandemic has challenged as well as brings new opportunity to look afresh at the biblical texts. Thus, this paper will deal generally with the interpretation of Biblical texts in view of this pandemic mainly in the Gospel accounts to see how this issue can be addressed from Christian perspective.

## Meaning of Plague

According to the Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, plagues are infectious diseases occurring naturally or in punishment for

sin, or other calamities sent by God.[1]Easton's Bible Dictionary defines a plague as a stroke of affliction or disease. Sent as a divine chastisement (Num. 11:33; 14:37; 2 Sam. 24:21). Painful afflictions or diseases (Lev. 13:3,5,30; 1kgs. 8:37), or severe calamity (Mark: 5:29; Luke 7:21), or the judgement of God, so called (Exo. 9:14).[2] The Meriam Webster Dictionary defines plagues as an epidemic disease causing a high rate of mortality or a disease that causes death and that spreads quickly to a large number of people.[3]

In the New Testament, there are several words translated as plague, including λοιμός (loimos) and πληγή (plege). Πληγή is the most common word for plague in the NT. Though not always to be understood as God's judgement upon a group of people, the terms sometimes describe one. For example, Jesus used λοιμός when he said of Jerusalem, "there will be great earthquakes, and in various place famines and pestilences" Luke 21:11.[4]

## History of Plagues

There have been similar pandemics in the past. The most ancient recorded instance is probably the so-called Antonine Plague or Plague of Galen in 165-180 CE. The disease involved is uncertain, but is thought to have been measles or smallpox which killed around five million people. Then there was the Plague of Jusnianin 541-542 CE. This was a bubonic disease which was spread from animals (rats) via fleas to humans. It is reckoned that over 25 million died. There was a further bubonic plague, known as the Black Death, in the 14th century which killed an estimated 70 to 100 million people.Much later in history, there were several cholera pandemics in the 19th and early 20th centuries in which over a million died. A flu pandemic took the lives of 20 to 50 million in 1918-1920. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was at its peak in 2005-2012, has had a death toll of around 32 million. These are all classified as pandemics.

The coronavirus, like the bubonic plague, is thought to have started with animals and spread to humans. There has been a vast improvement in understanding of disease and in medicine in recent times, and this has probably had the effect of making many people contentedly imagine that pandemics have surely now been relegated to history. Only after this pandemic again are people beginning to realize that they have not. So, how do one respond to this new circumstance?[5]



## Coronavirus: A Blessing or a Curse?

Social media is full of Christian gospel messages. One come across many videos saying that Covid-19 is a warning sign of the end time; the signs of divine wrath; or the consequences of violations of natural laws. It is the end time, the fulfilment of 666, and China is branded as anti-Christ/Christian because of their anti-Christian attitude and activities; it is God's punishment for the sinful people.[6] Few are thus very quick to leap on to social media and boldly proclaim that COVID-19 is divine judgment, that the nation deserves it. Not merely is this form of religious fundamentalism profoundly unhelpful, it is also incredibly arrogant.[7] Instead of discerning God's love amidst suffering, many have over-emphasized on an angry God. This is nothing but a prosperity theology. When one measure God's works only from abundant blessings and miraculous cure perspective, then it is prosperity theology. Some even prophesied that Israel will be the only country that will not be affected by Covid-19, however, it too got affected by the pandemic.Thus, it is not a curse/divine punishment, but a blessing as it makes people realize their mistakes and open up new opportunities to work for God's kingdom. Covid-19 brings many new issues, challenges, and also opportunities to re-examine one's journey of faith.[8] It also brings new opportunities and at the same time challenges to look at the various Biblical texts anew and derive new meanings from it. In such a context, Biblical texts can be interpreted so as to meet the needs of these challenges facing people worldwide today.

## Biblical Interpretation in view of Covid-19: Plague in the Gospel Accounts

Disease and illness are part of the fabric of human life and, as such, they play their part in the biblical literature. By far the greatest part of plagues in the Bible is contained in the Old Testament and is usually presented in a historical context, while the New Testament descriptions are relatively few and presented in the context of miraculous cures.[9] Few passages are selected from the Gospel accounts and explained further to show how Jesus may have encountered the Covid-19 pandemic like situation.

In John chapter 9, Jesus and his disciples came upon a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples ask the standard question, not that different from the question many people are asking today about the coronavirus.When asked whether it's his sin or his parents' sins, Jesus replied that it was neither his nor his parents' sin. But it happened so that God's works could be seen in him(vv.1-3).·Jesus, doesnot look back to a supposed cause which would enable the onlookers to feel self-righteous that they had understood some inner cosmic moral mechanism, some sin that God had had to punish. He looks forward to see what God is going to do about it. That translates directly into what Jesus is going to do about it. So, he heals the man.[10]

In another incident in John chapter 11, as Jesus and his followers head back towards Jerusalem and came to Bethany, they already heard the news that their friend Lazarus, who was particularly dear to Jesus, has been sick; then, soon after, that he had died. It left John's reader to wonder as to why could not Jesus, who healed a stranger's son at a distance (John 5:43-54), not have done the same for his friend.

However, John invites his readers to read between the lines. When, eventually, Jesus gives the command to take away the stone from the tomb so that he can call Lazarus out and back into life, the first thing he does is to pray with thanksgiving that God had heard his prayer. This must mean that, before journeying to



Bethany, Jesus had prayed that Lazarus, though dead, would not decompose, and would be ready to be raised back to life. Jesus knows that the road is now clear. He remains sovereign through all of this; sovereign in knowing what is going on, what it will cost the family to go through this terrible moment, and what he will then do. This is all part of the dark mystery which John is unveiling, the mystery in which Jesus himself will shortly go down into death in order to overthrow 'the ruler of this world' (John 12:31), and, unlike Lazarus in this incident, will emerge into a new kind of life, and immortal physicality.[11]

The paradox here, Wright suggest as a vital clue for how one should approach the whole question of understanding the present predicament. The Jesus who has prayed, who is taking charge, who knows what he is going to do, weeps at the tomb of his friend (John 11:35). The tears are real, it not just putting on a show of emotion in order to demonstrate sympathy with Mary and Martha. The horror of death is overwhelming, even for the Lord of life. And the tears of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus point on to 'now is my soul troubled' in 12:27, to Mark's and Matthew's description of Jesus in Gethsemane, and to the awful 'My God, why did you abandon me' on the cross itself (Matthew 12:46; Mark 15:34). That sequence adds up to the complex ways in which the different Gospels understand the very notion of power itself, of divine 'control' or 'taking charge', the central idea of 'kingdom', being redefined around Jesus.[12] In Jesus we see a God who knows the pain and the sorrow of the world.[13]

Coming back to the tomb of Lazarus, with the present coronavirus pandemic questions ringing in one's heads, Martha and Mary, and then the bystanders, both say in effect that it is Jesus' fault. Could Jesus not have done something to stop his death? (John 11:21, 32, 37). The question echoes down the years, with every new tragedy. Why did God allow this? Why didn't God step in and stop it? As with the man born blind, Jesus is not looking back to see what might or might not have happened. People have

blamed him, but he is not going to blame anyone. He has trusted his Father (Mother), and is looking ahead to see what must now happen. And the way to that goal is through tears. The God who John has told us became incarnate in and as Jesus of Nazareth is the God, the Word-Made-Flesh, who weeps at the tomb of his friend. That could be the clue to a great deal of wisdom. Wisdom that we need is rather badly right now.

Jesus doesn't turn the tables on Martha, Mary and the critical crowd and suggest that all this happened because they were sinful and now ought to repent. He just weeps. And then - with the authority born of that mixture of tears and trust - he commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb. If there is a word for the present situation as such, facing not only a pandemic but all the consequent social and cultural upheaval, Wright think it might be right here.[14]

Thus, John's Gospel displays the signs that Jesus was doing. These were not things like earthquakes or famines, plagues or floods. They were not meant to frighten people into submission or belief, or to warn them that the world was coming to a shuddering halt. They were signs of new life, of new creation. They were signs of God coming into the ordinary and making it extraordinary, coming to bring healing to a world of sickness, giving bread to the hungry; sight to the blind; and life to the dead. They were signs that the world was coming into a new beginning.[15]

Thus, Wright suggest, then, that from the time of Jesus onwards one see Jesus' followers telling people about God's kingdom, and summoning them to repent, not because of any subsequent events such as famines or plagues but because of Jesus himself.[16] As Jesus himself said in John 20:21, 'As the father has sent me, so I'm sending you.' As Jesus had been to Israel, so his followers were to be to the world.

In Mark 3:10, we see accounts of Jesus healing a vast majority of people. And in Mark 5:25-34, Jesus healed a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. The



woman on hearing about Jesus, had faith that she could be healed and made well if only she can touch him. And as such she tried hard to touch the cloak of Jesus and on touching him, she felt that she was healed of her disease. Jesus knowing that his power went out confronts who touched him and on knowing, he told her that it was her faith that has made her well. As such in this context of pandemic, one must stand strong in faith and through that one can overcome all kinds of barriers.

## Christian Response to the Pandemic

Wright has urged that one should embrace lament as the vital initial Christian response to this pandemic.[17] In a time of acute crisis, when death sneaks into houses, when one may feel healthy but may be carrying the virus without knowing it, when every stranger on the street is a threat, when all people go around in masks, when churches are shut and people are dying with nobody to pray by their bedside - this is a time for lament. For admitting one don't have easy answers. For refusing to use the crisis as a loudspeaker for what one had been wanting to say in any case. For weeping at the tomb of one's own friend, for the inarticulate groaning of the Spirit. 'Rejoice with those who rejoice,' said Paul, 'and weep with those who weep.' Yes, and the world is weeping right now. The initial calling of the Church, first and foremost, is to take one's place humbly among the mourners instead of rushing to judgements. The old philosophers' 'problem of evil' cannot be 'solved' except at the foot of the cross.[18]

Thus, the focus on Jesus needs to be the starting point in responding to the pandemic. Paul writes in Ephesians of a battle 'against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12). This is quite applicable to the pandemic. The NT seems to hold two different things in tension when it comes to this battle. The first is that God has already launched his kingdom 'on earth as in heaven' with the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. The second is that the battle continues until the day God comes

to judge the world. That is the good news, the gospel Christians believe and preach. It's all rooted in God's promise ultimately to put everything right. Jesus brings this promise, and the character of God, into close and personal focus.[19]

If this is taken into account the pandemic would not be interpreted apocalyptically.This pandemic is not the first in history. There have been many more devastating plagues and events than this one. Each time there is a temptation to interpret such events apocalyptically which were false. Jesus prohibited his disciples from predicting the exact time for his return. They should rather continue with their works as if he is not coming, since he will come at the time when least expected. The same goes today in this situation of pandemic one should rather preach the message of hope for the future. Jesus has never promised life without suffering. Jesus tells his disciples to have peace. But that peace is in spite of persecution they will face. Any theology which promises life without pain, illness, death is not according to Christ.

In John 10:10 Jesus has promised abundant life. It is common to associate abundant life promised by Jesus with material things. Wealth and well-being are presented as the ultimate result of our faith and being a fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. Endless pursuit of wealth leads to corruption, as a result of greed and selfishness, to always want more. The outbreak of this pandemic has taught humanity that those things that humans seek are after all not that valuable. Thus, it is a call for all humans to focus on what matters most in life together as we face mutual vulnerability.[20] It calls us to learn again from our forbearers, who looked to scripture's description of God's agency in times of disaster as a compass for their own times.[21] No human can comfort other souls in this pandemic the way God can. It comes from God's word, the Bible.[22]

Covid-19 has impacted people differently. Wherever church is present, it is a reminder to take seriously its call to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable as Matthew 25:40 advocates. The poor,



the homeless, the unemployed, refugees, displaced people suffer more than those whose economic and social situation enable them to fend for themselves better. Churches are called to remember Jesus saying that the way we serve him is through serving those in our midst who need extra attention in different ways.[23] Since humans were all equal in the eyes of the virus, so should we be made more equal in other ways too.[24]

## Reflection

The New Testament insists oneto put Jesus at the center of the picture and work outwards from there. The minute one looks at the world around and jump to conclusions about God without looking carefully at Jesus, one stands in serious danger of forcing through an 'interpretation' which might look attractive but which actually screens Jesus out of the picture. Jesus of Nazareth came into Galilee saying that now is the time to repent and believe the good news. It is vital for reflection today in times of this pandemic. A lot of the talk about 'What is God doing in the coronavirus pandemic' assumes that God is 'sovereign'and it assumes what that 'sovereignty' will mean. This is what it looks like, he was saying as he healed a leper, or as he announced forgiveness on his own authority to a penitent woman. This is what it looks like, he was saying as he went up to Jerusalem that last time and solemnly announced God's final judgment on the city, the system, and the institution that had refused God's way of peace. This is what it looks like, he said as he hung on the cross, with the words 'King of the Jews' above his head. And the list goes so on.[25]

Unless one is prepared to see the Jesus-events, the messianic momentas the ultimate call to penitence, because they are the ultimate announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom, one will be bound to over-interpret other events to compensate. There will be a vacuum, a Jesus-shaped blank, and we shall fill it by saying (as Jesus had warned that people would say) 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' (Luke 17.21) Thus, Jesus himself is the reason why people should turn from idolatry, injustice and all wickedness.

When we summons to repentance, and the announcement of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven, come not through wars, earthquakes, famines or plagues. They come through Jesus. Through the story of Jesus himself, told, preached, announced; through the people of Jesus, the people in whose lives Jesus himself lives by his Spirit; through the strange work of Jesus even in parts of the world where his name is not recognized. Part of the answer to the question, 'Where is God in the pandemic?' must be, 'Out there on the front line, suffering and dying to bring healing and hope.'[26] Peace in a pandemic? Only Jesus can give that. The issue for all is to trust him to do so.[27]

Our relationship with people in the face of calamity becomes very important. As God's mercy and grace is shown in times of calamity and problems, our part is to do the same to show our love and mercy to others. As stated above, the pandemic had led to so many discriminations, stigmas against one another however; it is not a time for such. But it is a time to show our hospitality, generosity and concern for others in such times. God does not leave us in this situation, although many unpredictable things happen and we face, but even in those circumstances God does not leave us unattended. So, it is a call for a radical and prophetical ministry on the part of the Christian leaders and believers, a call to let us discern the love that he has shown us, to bring out a transformative action among others and to bring transformation in the lives of others.

## Conclusion

Whenever any natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods or an epidemic breaks out and take away human lives, people quickly leap out and tell that it is a judgement from God. As mentioned above, sadly many gospel messages go on to tell people that God is punishing or cursing people for their sins and to repent of their sins. However, from the gospel accounts, one can be clear about what Jesus reminds that one is not in a position to know why these events happen. If in any way are, we to know, then we would



be in no need of God. All these sufferings and pains that human encounter prompt to set one's hope on the living God than to trust one's own. It serves as a powerful reminder to cast oneself to God's mercy. Thus, the coronavirus pandemic has brought new opportunities and challenges at the same time to look at the Scripture in a new light.

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# Human Suffering and the Pain of God: A Case of Child Sexual Abuse

***Vinod Shemron. S***

## Introduction

Humans suffer and creation groans. Today the world is in perils, affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this crucial time, humans' question: where is God in this pandemic? Why is God silent while humans suffer and die? Humans have been suffering from time immemorial, the pandemic now has only aggravated the situation.Therefore, human suffering is an important topic to theologically and ministerially ponder upon.Hence, to narrow down, using child[1] sexual abuse in Bangalore, Karnataka as the primary issue, this paper seeks to understand Human suffering and the pain of God.

## Stories of *Seema*[2] and *Mitra*[3]

A case of child sexual abuse was reported on the New Minute in Bengaluru where a one-and-a-half-year-old girl *Seema*, was sexually assaulted by a 15-year-old boy. This incident occurred within the Harohalli Police Station limits and the boy was arrested. It was reported that the girl's parents noticed some bleeding on her left eyebrow and took her to the Kaggalipura Government Hospital immediately. The Harohalli Police reported that the girl's family works in the temple and lives there. It is recorded that, on the evening of 17th September 2020, the 15-year-old boy allegedly lured the girl to an empty plot near the temple and sexually assaulted her. The police said that, the boy was regular to the temple. On September 17, he went there and lured the girl

away on pretext of playing a game. The doctor at the Vani Vilas informed that a medical exam was done and concluded that the girl was sexually assaulted. The police and the family were informed of the same.The Harohalli Police took the mother's statement and questioned the eyewitness. "The eyewitness said that he saw the boy assaulting the girl. But when he questioned the boy, he allegedly denied it. We took the boy into custody and the juvenile task force questioned him. He admitted to sexually assaulting her after we told him about the medical report," the Harohalli Police said. A First Information Report (FIR) has been registered under the POCSO Act at the Harohalli Police Station. The 15-year-old boy is currently at the Juvenile Justice Home in Madiwala. "There were evidentiary marks of sexual assault on the child. She was discharged from the hospital after treatment on Monday," the doctor treating the child said.[3]

Previously, the Times of India on 28th February 2020 reported that, a seven-year-old girl *Mitra*[4] was repeatedly abused sexually by a fifty-two-year-old Christian pastor in Pechiparai village in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu as reported by the Valliyoor All Woman Police Station in Tirunelveli district. S. Selvaraj of Siragodu village near Pechiparai in Kanyakumari district was a pastor in the church for two decades. According to the police, the victim, who is a school goer, lived close to the church where she and her family members used to go. The incidences are reported to have occurred on the church premises itself. The girl said, she was initially unaware of his sexual advances and realized that things were going wrong when he made her feel uncomfortable. The girl ran into her house and alerted her parents, rushed to the place and picked up an argument with Selvaraj. The parents also lodged a complaint with the Valliyoor All Woman Police Station, following which the accused was picked up for questioning. Police said preliminary inquiries revealed that the accused repeatedly abused her on December 25 and 31 and in February.[5]



The rapid increase in the rate of Child sexual abuses reported is worrisome. Though *Seema* is a non-Christian, *Mitra* is a Christian. These cases of child sexual abuse, haunt lives of children and their families. Therefore, the issue of Child Sexual Abuse is extremely relevant for the church to address and ponder upon both theologically and ministerially.

## Statistics of Child Sexual Abuse

The Deccan Herald recently reported that Karnataka has witnessed the highest number of child abuse cases since the lockdown compared to neighboring states, statistics show. A Child Line India data revealed that more than 6 lakh calls were received between March 20 and April 20, of which 18,217 calls required on-ground intervention and 19% of these accounted for cases requiring protection from abuse, including sexual abuse trafficking, abandonment and neglect.[6] As per the data available with the department of Women and Child Welfare gathered through Child Line, Karnataka has witnessed 312 child abuse cases, the highest among the Southern states as on 3rd May 2020. Tamil Nadu recorded second highest child abuse cases with 224, followed by Kerala with 181, Andhra Pradesh 129, Telangana 10 and Puducherry (UT) 7. Y Mariswamy, former chairperson, Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said, "As the government is concentrating on Covid-19 pandemic, the child abusers have become active and manipulative. The stakeholders who work for children's welfare should come to the fore and protect children from abuses."[7]

The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 years have experienced forced sexual intercourse or any other form of sexual violence involving physical contact though this certainly is an underestimate. Out of the total child abuses in India, the most affected are female children (76%) compared to the male children.[8] However, there are many that have been unnoticed or unreported.

The Childline India Foundation reported a 50% increase in the phone calls than usual days in the last two weeks of the lockdown. Out of the total calls received during the period, 30% were related to protection from abuse. During lockdown, Child sexual abuse can be devastating as the isolation has further limited support networks, making it even more difficult for the victims to seek help or escape. When the data reveals that 93% of perpetrators are relatives or known individuals,[9] this also exposes the possible magnitude of the associated helplessness and mental health consequences in the victims. A more pathetic aspect of the scenario, as reported by The Childline India Foundation, is the regularly received "silent calls" in the helplines where the child behind the call would not know "what /how to express."[10] Therefore, Child sexual abuse is a pertinent issue that need to be dealt by the church, theologically and ministerially.

## Human Suffering and Child Sexual Abuse

### Human Suffering

Bueno-Gómez proposes to define human suffering as an unpleasant or even anguishing experience, severely affecting a person at a psychophysical and existential level. Pain and suffering are considered unpleasant. However, the definition neither includes the idea that pain and suffering can attack and even destroy the self nor the idea that they can constructively expand the self; both perspectives can be equally useful for managing pain and suffering, but they are not defining features of the same. And sexual abuse is one kind of suffering which affects victim's own attachment to the world (including personal management, or the cultural and social influences).[11]

Ronald E Anderson contends that, "any definition for human suffering fails to comprehend its meaning because of its complexity and vastness."[12] Thus, human suffering can be broadly categorized into three forms of suffering namely: physical suffering like Pain, abuse, agony, discomfort, hurt, incapacitation etc. mental suffering like anguish, anxiety, addiction, distress, troubled, craving, post-traumatic stress disorder, compulsive disorder, loss and other types of loss of meaning etc. and social suffering like social exclusion, discrimination, ostracization, persecution, disability, shame (self-ostracization), distrust etc. These three categories, though they are separated, are intertwined with one another as reasons, incidences or as consequences.



### Child Sexual Abuse

Marie Fortune terms sexual abuse as "an act of violence, hatred, and aggression. Whether it is viewed clinically or legally, objectively or subjectively, in which violence is the common dominator. Like other acts of violence (assault, murder, nuclear war etc.), there is a violation of an injury to victims, the injuries maybe psychological or physical."[13]

Miles and Stephenson define child sexual abuse as, "contacts or interaction between a child and an older or more knowledgeable child or adult, when the child is being used as an object of gratification for an older child or adult's sexual needs."[14] Peter Mosgofian and George Ohlschlager suggest that "child sexual abuse is the immoral and criminal use of the child as a sexual object by an adult or an older minor child."[15] Child sexual abuse may include assault, rape, touching and fondling a child's genitals, masturbation, oral genital contact, digital penetration, and vaginal intercourse, exhibitionism and photographing the child nude, forcible kissing, and any other form of sexual advances. Child sexual abuse is not confined only to the physical contact, as it could include non-contact abuse like exposure and child pornography, sexual talks, etc. Child sexual abuse can be said as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity, that the child does not fully comprehend, and unable to give informed consent to, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.[16]

## Projected Reasons for Child Sexual Abuse

There could be other reasons, nevertheless, Jesudason Jeyaraj suggests the following reasons as those usually quoted by survivors of child sexual abuse. Children are innocent and trust the abusers (mostly people known to the family). Children are powerless under the domination of the perpetrators, to escape from the abusers. Lockdown frustration as an important reason for such abuse of children. Children of broken homes and separated from their parents look for love from others, being cheated. Children are vulnerable and can be cheated easily by an adult for money or sweets and chocolates or anything small. Children are not given the awareness about their vulnerability and dangers of sexual abuse. Some adults believe in the superstitions/myths that they should have sex with children for their well-being.[17]

Sexual violence celebrated in movies, internet and other forms of media also instigate the minds of the offender. Low frustration-tolerance and inappropriate expressions of anger and lust in the offender. The experience of abuse, in the earlier part of the life of the offender urging him/her to do so. In times such as the pandemic, abuses can also be results of overstressed caregivers becoming violent or abusive due to economic crisis and children's restricted mobility as the schools are closed. The children are struggling to cope with an alternative lifestyle and the trauma experienced due to these increasing incidents.[18] Apart from that, regular online interactions through classes/webinars/trainings etc. may cause cyber bullying which is an ongoing cause of increasing child sexual abuse.

The *Devadasi* system that is still prevalent is an example of such harsh socio-religious practice of rape culture and sexual abuse of children. The *Devadasi* system, despite not being as widespread as it once was, continues to thrive in many parts of Western and Southern India. A combination of religious pressure, economic necessity, and social construction form the basis of the *Devadasi* institution and perpetuates its survival.[19] This patriarchal



system is an important reason why many young women, lured in the pretext of being married to the deity, are raped by temple priests and authorities.

Caste and poverty on the other hand, have played a vital role in the suffering of humanity, especially in India. Caste, a discriminatory socio-religious order divides people, thus leading to a social hierarchy. In this social order the minority elite stomps over larger groups. Using the name of caste and faith, India has seen several hate crimes, rapes, murders, abuses and violence. The International Dalit Solidarity Network reports that most sexual violence cases against Dalit women and girls (over 80%) were committed by men from dominant castes.[20] According to the National Crime Records Bureau, more than four Dalit women and girls are raped every day. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, says over 23 percent of Dalit women report being raped, and many have reported multiple instances of rape.[21] This leads the understanding that sexual abuse overall can also be understood as a political ploy to ignite fear in the minds of the communities resisting oppressive powers. The oppressive communities use abuse, violence, rape, murder etc. as weapons to instigate animosity to fuel their greed for power and authority. Therefore, caste oppression has also been a major reason for sexual abuses, especially child sexual abuse.

## Repercussions of Child Sexual Abuse: Psycho-Social Condition

A survivor of Child Sexual Abuse often withdraws from his/her peers. Since the child rarely shares the experience with anyone, he/she believes no one else has ever experienced this before. In a way, isolating himself/herself, from the peers, at a very early stage, the survivor (in these cases, a child) learns early not to trust adults. The child learns that affection they are likely to get from anyone is sexual in nature. Marie M. Fortune further adds that, the child also learns that the sexual attention is not for their benefit, but solely for the benefit of the offender. The child loses almost all

sense of self-worth. They feel responsible for the sexual abuse and develop overwhelming negative feelings about themselves. Many a time, this loss of self-worth moves the child to self-destructive behaviors such as lack of interest in education, lethargic towards securing his/her future, drug or alcohol abuse, self-mutilation, overeating, under eating, suicide attempts and so on.[22]

The child abuse survivor withdraws from the activities of the family yet tries to explain but may not able to communicate the exact description of the incident. The fear of self-indulged crime is constantly assumed and exaggerated in the mind. The constant presence of the perpetrator, at most times, especially during this pandemic, makes it difficult for the child to make any clear advances to reveal to the elders the intensity of the incident. Therefore, child sexual abuse is not merely a child suffering in the hands of the perpetrator, but it is humanity's loss of humanness a disease that has struck harder than the pandemic. While the pandemic strikes people, child sexual abuse as a pandemic strikes the future of humanity itself. Thus, child suffering is treated as human suffering.

## Suffering of the Child and the Pain of God: A Wake-up Call

Common questions and statements humans make in the context of suffering are: "There is just so much suffering in this world, and God does not seem to care," how do Christians address suffering? Does God also suffer, or is God beyond any negative emotions or states of being? Terence E. Fretheim addresses the suffering of God in the Old Testament by stating:

> The God of the Old Testament (OT) is commonly pictured in the teaching of the church as primarily a God of judgment and wrath, an 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' kind of God, who is often vindictive and punitive, seldom gracious and compassionate. [...] This churchly development is at least in part due to scholarly neglect of those OT images which portray God in non-monarchial terms, not least those which depict God as one who suffers, as one who has entered deeply into the human situation and made it his (sic) own.[23]



A currently unpopular answer to the question of God's relation to human suffering is that God, as God, suffers with humans. This view of a suffering God has been lingering for a few decades now. Alfred North Whitehead describes God as the "fellow sufferer who understands."[24] Ulrich Eibach maintains that "a God who cannot suffer cannot be close to the suffering creature."[25] Jürgen Moltmann argues that "the one who cannot suffer cannot love either,"[26] and John Mcquarrie opines that "a God of love is inevitably vulnerable, for there is no love that does not suffer."[27] There also exists views that, if God as God suffers with humans, it would inevitably imply that God's love is self-seeking and thus less than perfect. Arguments on the other side say, that God does not suffer with humans, which may seem to imply that God is indifferent or lacking in love altogether. Thomas G. Weinandy strongly opposes the idea of a God who knows and experiences suffering. He states that, "Contemporary theologians wrongly hold that the attribute of impassibility is ascribing something positive of God, that is, that He (sic) is static, lifeless and inert, and so completely devoid of passion."[28] How then can God's relationship with the suffering be explained? Perhaps, it is best to learn to speak of God's relation to human suffering by considering first the event of the suffering and death of God's Son.

The suffering and death of the Son manifest the unconditional love of God: "But God proves his (sic) love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."[29] God sent the Son, not to redeem himself, but as a gracious gift of love to redeem the world in the power of the Spirit: "For God so loved the world that he (sic) gave his (sic) only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."[30] Therefore, it ought to be said that, since Christ himself is God, the

eternal Son of the God, in Christ "the impassible God suffers and dies"[31] in Gutierrez's view. Thus provoking, to take incarnation seriously and recognize that there is no suffering closer to God or more really God's own, than the suffering of Jesus the Christ. Moltmann makes it clear that God suffered what humans suffer "Jesus was made a participant of our affliction."[32]

Like Jesus, a child is also imposed to be a participant of human afflictions. Many children are abused in ways unimaginable. But the church remains silent on such issues, making every child feel that the church is not concerned about them. Child sexual abuse is a problem at the heart of the society, and therefore at the heart of the church.The prophetic voice of the church is weakened by its inability to practice what it proclaims.[33] Traditionally in India, the responsibility of care and protection of children has been with families and communities that live around. Humans ought to take responsibility to protect the little ones. Therefore, human affliction of Sexual abuse is a result of the way in which sexuality is perceived.

For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the 'God of Hope.' Empowered by this hope, the Christian's response should include the mission of the church to all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world, and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. The church should therefore be seen as the people of hope, who continually experience the God who is present in his promises. The coming kingdom provides the church with a much broader view of reality than merely a private vision of personal salvation. The coming kingdom also creates a confronting and transforming vision of the mission of the church as the people of God. For Moltmann, the whole of creation longs for the renewal by the 'God of Hope.' Empowered by this hope, the Christian's response should include the mission of the church to all nations, the hunger for righteousness in the world, and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. The church should therefore be seen as the people of hope, who



continually experience the God who is present in his promises. The coming kingdom provides the church with a much broader view of reality than merely a private vision of personal salvation. The coming kingdom also creates a confronting and transforming vision of the mission of the church as the people of God.

## Child Sexual Abuse: A Stumbling Block Before Children

Child Sexual Abuse is a suffering that lasts long. It causes constant pain and has varied repercussions. This suffering of the child is a similar suffering that Christ went through when he hung on the cross which too in a way is a form of sexual abuse, in exploiting/mutilating the body of a person. The pain that every child-victim goes through thus, is a cross-like episode through the brutal experiences at the hands of the perpetrators.

Matthew 18:6 says, "if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea."[34] Child sexual abuse can be a huge stumbling block before children in depriving them of their childhood and have detrimental impacts on their life. Jesus addresses in the Gospel narratives such instances of the adults becoming stumbling blocks for children. Jesus would, thus say, it would be better to fasten a milestone around the neck of the perpetrator and drown to the depths of the sea. Such harsh words from Jesus is a reminder that the church ought to fight and stand by the side of these survivor-children. This only reiterates, when a child is in pain, God is in pain. Therefore, when a child suffers, God suffers.

In his work, *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann calls out the "Exodus Church" which he refers to as the "pilgrim people of God" as agents of transformation. The whole creation suffers. For Moltmann, the whole creation longs for renewal by the 'God of Hope.' In such a context, Christians, not merely the institutionalised church or her congregations, but all Christians in their worldly capacity renewed by this God of hope. Empowered

by this hope, a Christian response must include the hunger for righteousness in the world, and love for the true life of the endangered and damaged creation. The church should therefore be seen as the people of hope, who continually experience the God who is present in the promises God makes. The coming kingdom provides the church with a much broader view of reality than merely a private vision of personal salvation. The coming kingdom also creates a confronting and transforming vision of the mission of the church as the people of God.[35] Therefore, in the light of the occurrences of child sexual abuse, the church's mission must be in confronting the existing social disorder and envision transformation of people's lives, especially those who have suffered abuses.

Does suffering end merely with the hope for a life ahead? Certainly not. Suffering does not end over-night but a process leading towards liberation. In the crucifixion and death of Christ, resurrection was liberation, hence in the sexual abuse of a child, rehabilitation and justice pave way to liberation. This calls for following of child-friendly legislative laws and legal codes to name the perpetrator and bring justice to the child-survivor. It also calls for a theological approach that will include children who are victims of any form of abuse. To perceive suffering and pain theologically engulfs believers into experiencing God in and through their pain, thus paving way to understand, even God went through the pain the victim goes through. This will not only broaden theological understanding among people but will also encourage social action against such injustices.

## Conclusion

The alarm of child sexual abuse has rung. What should be the initial response? Firstly, the parents and elders at home/church/society are to be informed of the potential dangers of sexual abuse and encourage having positive and healthy relationship with their children so that children can go to them in any uncomfortable situation. Secondly, the children need to be educated to recognize



and report any kind of inappropriate touching and make them understand what sexual abuse is. It is also essential to find an appropriate language that is much simpler to explain sexual abuse and the concept of love to children.[36] Sexual abuse of children should not be tolerated, and the allegations should be taken seriously. The offender must be investigated and made to realize the detrimental effects of abuse on children, the meaning of intimacy, love and sex. Sex education should be made compulsory mot merely in schools/colleges but even in seminaries and churches. Churches and seminaries must delve into articulating theologies that are child-friendly.[37]

In conclusion, this is a theological task because it concerns how believers speak about God and relate with God through the practical challenges the church faces. The people ought to stay vigilant to the silent and invisible crimes that send out the loudest cries. Humanity should act in ways that respect the dignity and worth of every child as Ron O' Gardy says, "to abuse the trust of a child is the greatest sin we can conceive, but to love and protect a child is the finest gift we have to offer."[38] The entire human race as a community should wake up to the problem of sexual abuse of children. It is mandatory for all to stand with those children who are sexually abused, who become objects of harm and exploitation, because God suffers the pain of every abused-child-victim.

## End Notes

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# Ideologies of Savarkar, Hedgwar, and Golwalkar: A Citizen's View

***Alan Varghese***

## Introduction

Pluralism and plurality are the essences of the nation of India. 'Pluralism' is an ideology and 'plurality' refers to existence. Referring to India as a 'pluralistic society' means – India contains people from different strata of life, especially in terms of religion, culture, and language. India has religions, which are originated in India and have come here from other shores. We need to understand the fact that, geographically. India did not exist before the coming of the Muslims and the British, but territories ruled by different kings and chieftains. The unification started only with the coming of Muslim rulers and later by British colonialism. However, the claims of some ideologues in India created a feeling in us that this nation was 'one' in all its essence from time immemorial, such that it was never pluralistic but 'one' society. In the present context, the Indian society includes Tribals, Dalits, minorities like Christians and Muslims. They are in India for centuries and are part and parcel of this nation. But, their existence is questioned, and at times their future in this land seems to be at stake. In this context, ideological frameworks that challenge the essence of this nation are to be seriously scrutinized. This writing looks at the ideology of V. D. Savarkar,[1] M. S. Golwalkar,[2] and K. B. Hedgwar[3] from a pluralistic citizen's perspective.

## 1. What is an Ideology?

Ideology could be related to dogmatic propositions, the connotation of political sophistication, dominant modes of thought, and revolutionary movements and parties. It could be from the interest of a social class and even from economic interest. This shows, ideology has a variety of traits and it includes different modes of thought. Nevertheless, it is possible to understand ideology at an interesting level. Ideology contains the organization of opinions, attitudes, and values that is connected to the thinking about man and society. It includes consistent development in the approach towards man and society. This pattern of thoughts would advocate conduct and action to the individuals in the society in response to the existing challenges for the ideology proposed. Ideology aims to make the social situation meaningful.[4] Hence, Ideology has a far-fetching effect in society and it could be transforming in any direction provided people engage in implementing a certain way of thinking and practicing.

## 2. Ideological Development of Hindu Nationalism: Background

'Hindu nationalism' is an ideology, which has been in Indian politics for many decades.[5] Though Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925, the nationalistic feeling was not a sudden emanation but an effect of reform and revival within the Indian community. The ideological framework of the RSS goes back to the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj. The British system of education and administrative measures molded people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, to become a reformer of Hinduism.[6] Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, in the 1870s, maintained the significance of Aryans, the sacred land, and the importance of language – Sanskrit.[7] As a matter of revival, he introduced the *shuddhi* movement to convert other religionists into Hinduism.[8] From 1870 onwards, Hindu



*zamindars*, moneylenders, and middle-class professionals began to propagate anti-Muslim views by vehemently talking about tyrannical Muslim rulers and the importance of the British rulers in changing the previous Muslim administration. Pandit Lekh Ram, the leader of Arya Samaj demanded the expulsion of Muslims from India or else convert to Aryanism.[9] Thus, seeds of division were spread in the name of religion among property owners and traditional business classes and they consolidated their influence through 'hatred of the other communities.'[10]

During the above period, Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)[11] propagated an extremist view of nationalism in which 'religion and nationalism held hands together.'[12] He explained that an Indian becomes a nationalist when he/she is proud of the 'religion of the land', though he did not indicate what the place for popular beliefs in Hinduism was. Bal Gangadhar stressed Hindu revival as the legitimate means of national awakening.[13] Hence, he used the Ganapati festival and Shivaji festival as means of creating unity. Tilak also aroused passion among Hindus to counter the challenges posed by religions like Islam and Christianity.[14] Similarly, the Hindu Maha Sabha (HMS) came into existence as a response to the Hindu fears and anxieties.[15] In 1915, the All-India Hindu Society emerged with an agenda – "…to safeguard the interests of the Hindu community throughout India and elsewhere."[16] From 1923 onwards, *Shuddhi* (reconversion) and the need for the organization of Hindus were stressed and it grew towards 'militancy' along with the upsurge of communal riots in India.

From the beginning of the Renaissance in India, a nationalistic tendency emerged as an outcome of different frameworks of thought from different Hindu religious figures. This tendency, then took two routes: one, against the British government forming political parties and protests and the other was, the nationalistic ideology rerouted as 'Hindu Nationalism' through Savarkar and his followers.

## 3. Savarkarian Ideology

V. D. Savarkar[17] was the fountain-head who provided an ideology for the formulation of the RSS. As an astound reader of Dayananda, he defined Hindutva as not only having 'religious' connotation but along with other aspects like 'territory', 'race', and 'language.'[18] To him, Hindus are the descendants of Vedic Fathers who occupied the land since antiquity. He gave importance to Sanskrit and Hindi to make the language a pillar of identity. For Savarkar, the qualification to be a Hindu is accepting the land from Indus to the sea as the Parent Land, the land of ancestors by which he claims historical lineage. One must be a descendant of Hindu parents; that is, one must be a part of the ancient Sindhu race – a claim that challenges other religious communities. He recognized Sanskrit as the language, which expresses 'culture, literature, and history.'[19] Hence, Savarkar intended to create a nation of Hindus having a common lineage and aimed to materialize it through the Hindu Maha Sabha.[20] Savarkar was against including the Muslims and Christians under the Hindu umbrella as they hold onto other/new cult, for him, they were ceased to be inside the Hindu culture.

### 3.1. Savarkarian Nationalism

Savarkarian nationalistic thought emerged in the contest of the *khilafat* movement.[21] He expressed his views from prison through writings, and some of his thoughts are expressed in the book, *The Essentials of Hindutva*. It is famous for mythical imaginations and fascist approach.

#### 3.1.1. Politics of Naming

Savarkar used three terms for his theoretical framework – Hindu,' 'Hindutva' and 'Hindustan.' Along with this, he drew mythical geography for 'territorial sovereignty.'[22] The geographical boundaries of the land are between the Sindhu River in the Northern part of India to the seas in the Southern part of India. Inside these mythical boundaries, ancestors lived and the sacred fire was lit on the banks of Sindhu River, hence, this is the *Punyabhumi*.[23] Using the politics of naming, he sarcastically asks the possibility of changing the Muhammadan name to a Jewish one.[24] Inviting people to recognize that there is something in the name, he underlines the significance of the name, especially 'ancient name.' He claims that the mythic geographic boundary was known as the land of Hindus or 'Hindustan.' A Hindu means a person who regards this land, from the Indus to the Seas as Father-Land as well as Holy-Land. To express this he coined the term Hindutva on the backdrop of the *Khilafat* movement, which supported trans-nationalism. He used the word Hindutva to connect the name Hindu and Hindustan and for him, it is history than just a word.[25] His historical framework sets off from the assumption that India is the land of [mythical] Hindus, hence, his demand was, those who live in India must choose to love Hindu culture, love the land of India, no matter whether you are a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. Savarkar's ideology began with the thought of placing the name 'Hindutva' as the center of everything. The whole history of this land is under this term and he places Hinduism under Hindutva, that is, Hinduism is "a part of Hindutva."[26] This new framework is an absolute challenge to the historical entity of Hinduism. Hinduism is not just one religion but an amalgamation of different faith systems from the grass-root level to the philosophical systems of thought. Savarkar brings Hindutva challenging all the religious aspects of Hinduism into a political framework just to challenge the *khilafat* movement and Muslim separation movements.

#### 3.1.2. Ethnic Nationalism

In the whole being of races in India, Savarkar divided the Indian community into Aryans and non-Aryans. He accepted the view that the Aryans were newcomers and assumed that some of the natives were friendly to the newcomers. But to dilute the racial division he diplomatically called everyone Hindus. Further, he included both social and religious categories and made all to be one under the umbrella term 'Hindu.'[27] However, the underlining

thought was Aryanism which is a higher form of community in his view. It seems he was on the move to make Aryans the governing community or they must get priority over any other in this land.

### 3.1.3. Religious and Geographical Identity

'Religion' played a significant role in the development of his thought. The Ramayana and Mahabharata were taken to unite people together in the place of the Quran for Muslims, which is a binding force for the Muslim community. This land for him was where forefathers received the revealed knowledge (Vedas). All his claims started from the mythic geography in which he found his eternal and peripatetic community.[28] By politicizing religion, he attempted to create unity among the Hindus and attempted to prove that he was for the unity of the people of India. Savarkar in his ideology demanded that the non-Hindus are required to give up their faith and should have allegiance to the Hindu faith as the land is the Hindustan, which is *Pitrubhu*. For him, an exclusive allegiance was the only option that can be given to others.[29] Muslims and Christians could not always be brought under the umbrella term Hindutva, as their mythology and God-men are of foreign origin. Hence it is quite natural that they would be out of his system. Then how Savarkar would reconcile with the secular framework of the Indian administrative system is disputing. Either they must be separated which is against the secular understanding of the Indian constitution or the secular system must be sidelined for implementing Savarkarian thought.

### 3.1.4. Perspectives of Hedgewar and Golwalkar

Savarkar's ideology was practiced by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940). He founded the RSS in his town, Nagpur in 1925, after visiting Savarkar in the 1920s. Hedgewar prepared plans to work at the grass-root level of the society for practicing and propagating the Hindutva ideology. After Hedgewar, in 1940, M. S. Golwalker became the head of the organization and soon after independence, the RSS entered into politics in the form of Bharatiya Jana Sangh.[30]



### 3.1.5. Who is a Hindu? Who are the 'Other'?

As discussed above, the basic ideology of the RSS stems from the Arya Samaj and other nationalists, which then through the framework of Savarkar assumed four aspects – religion, territory, race, and language. In his view, the Hindus descended from Aryans and settled in India. National identity rests in geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture.[31] 'Hinduism' is one of the attributes of Hinduness. The Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and others are in essence Hindus but converted before some generations. They could be 'reintegrated' despite their allegiance to their faith. Common culture includes aspects like rituals, social rules, and languages. He stated, "A Hindu is one who regards India as his (/her) motherland and the most sacred spot on earth," and "The Hindus are no treaty-nation but an organic National Being."[32]

But, it was Golwalker[33] who gave a clear ideological charter for the RSS with *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Golwalkar attempted to develop cultural nationalism and defined RSS ideology like this,

> German national pride had now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races - the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.

He goes on,

> From this standpoint sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the non-Hindu people in

> Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of Hindu nation, i.e, they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-old traditions but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in this country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.

Guruji carries on,

> As a child of this soil, our well-evolved society has been living here for thousands of years...For, it is the forefathers of Hindu people who have set up standards and traditions…prescribed duties and rights… (and) shed their blood in defense of the sanctity and integrity of the Motherland. That all this has been done by Hindu people is a fact which our country of thousands of years bears eloquent testimony, it means that only Hindus have been living here as children of the soil.[34]

This thought in effect shows, other races must be erased to keep the purity of the nation like the Nazi way of erasing the Jewish race. The non-Hindus must adapt age-old traditions, be subordinate, claiming nothing, and live without any privilege and the privilege of an Indian citizen. This can only happen once the Indian secularist ideology is thwarted or the Indian constitution is rewritten in line with the RSS and other Hindu fundamentalist ideologies.

### 3.1.6. Golwalkarian Framework of Hindutva

At this juncture, a study of *We or Our Nationhood Defined* is conducive.[35] In this book, Golwalkar centered his thoughts, stemming from his predecessors, into five aspects; Nation, Race, Religion, Culture, and Language.[36] He derives impetus from the words of Ramachandra, an *avatara* in Hinduism. When Ramachandra's brother Lakshmana asked him about staying in Lanka after rescuing Sita from Ravana, Ramachandra replied, "Oh Lakshmana, this golden land of Lanka, with all its riches, has no appeal for me. To me, my mother and my motherland are greater by far than Heaven …."[37] Golwalkar, thus, derived the concept of the motherland from religion that too from one of the *avatars* in Hinduism. After giving a 'religious color,' to prove his claims, Golwalkar developed his arguments by exalting the culture of the land of India from time immemorial. He claimed that the prosperity we had in the past, developments we had in our sciences and arts and crafts, cultivation, industries, and trade were due to the great race. The essence of all the above is religion – obviously Hinduism – by which Hindustan (India) could develop a culture of sublime nobility.[38] Golwalkar purposefully evaded the question of the caste system and other evil practices of Indian society. He never recognized the contributions of other communities in this land. To him, the historicity of the nation can be claimed by Hindus only because only they have the rights to be called Indian Nationals.

### 3.1.7. Nationhood Defined

Golwalkar's ultimate aim was to move against secularism; for him, nationality was to denote "a population having common bonds of race, language, religions, tradition, and history…a nation is a community, members of which are bound to one another by racial, ethnological, religious and linguistic ties."[39] In his view, the essential ingredients for a nation are a 'home country' and a 'geographical unity.' To form a nation-idea, country, race, religion, culture, and language must exist unavoidably.[40] Loss or destruction of any of the above five constituents meant the end of the 'nation' as a nation.[41]

The race has common customs, common language, and common memories of glory or disaster – the race is a population

with a common origin under common culture. Thus, people of other origins should assimilate into the mother race and then be fused into it. This demand to become one with the original race encloses spheres like economic, political, religions, culture and language, however; 'they are not part and parcel of the national body.'[42] He has pointed, "We lost Hindu Nationhood" by founding a democratic state.[43] When democracy took control, it challenged culture as [Hindu] religion was sidelined from the mainstream. Indian culture is equal to Indian religions – Hinduism (and its offshoots). Unlike European nations, in India, religion and culture are together and culture is a factor of togetherness, hence, this needs to be uplifted.[44]

### 3.1.8. Prioritizing One Language

Along with the above ingredients, language took precedence in Golwakar's viewpoint. Language reflects culture, religion, history, and traditions. It expresses race-spirit and is a manifestation of national life. In his view, Afghanistan lost to Muslim invaders as it embraced Buddhism. Thus, it lost the hold of religion and fell prey, eventually lost its religion, culture, and language.[45] In India, language ceased to exist with the coming of invaders. Sanskrit was [considered as] the language of the elite, and the low castes were not permitted to learn and hear Vedas. Moreover, there are languages like Tamil and Malayalam, which have an ancient heritage like Sanskrit.[46] The question we need to ask here is, was Golwalkar opening the horizon for Dalits and Tribals who were disallowed from getting a taste of this language? The answer is 'no,' because he had a perfect caste-driven strategy in his mind. Well, due to the secular ideologies and growth of the educational system, English education has been offered to the low caste people who could afford to learn this as language, not the 'sacred' one. As Sanskrit ceased to exist as a spoken language, he took Hindi as the national language arguing that the western nations have unique national languages.



### 3.1.9. Supporting Caste System

Casteism, for him, was synonymous with the religious and nationalistic framework. In the work, *Bunch of Thoughts*, the Hindus are portrayed as *Virat Purusha*, the manifestation of the Almighty. He accepted the concept of four *Varnas* originated from different parts of *Purusha* and this vision is the core of the concept of nationhood.[47] For him, the caste system is not a hindrance to the glory of the nation. Hence, this cultural heritage needs to be followed and those who deny it are anti-national.[48]

### 3.1.10. Treatment of the Minority

When he deals with the minority, he takes the definition of the term minority as a "class of people incorporated in the body of the nation, citizens who differ from the majority of the population in race, religion, and language."[49] What needs to be done to them is well underlined with the examples of Germany and the Jewish people. He uses a term to explain his framework of thought, i.e., annihilate, as Hitler purged Germany.[50] By taking the example of the Jews for their ardent effort to keep the race purity, unity of geography, religious, cultural, and linguistic significance, Golwalkar vehemently stressed that other nations have attempted in doing such and were successful, then, Hindustan with such heritage must pursue these five aspects.

Now we shall look into the ramifications of the above thoughts as it is forcefully thrust upon the pluralistic landscape of our society.

## 4. Hindutva as a Challenge to the Pluralistic Existence

The above discussions point that for Hindutva ideology, India's national identity is equal to Hindu nationalism. But the nation India is not what the above ideologues have articulated. Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged various religious identities and for him, the nation was an amalgamation of communities.[51] The late Morarji Desai, India's prime minister during the period 1977-79 observed that "the concepts of Hindutva…are inherently flawed for it

seeks to replace India's polytheistic, tolerant, syncretic society that absorbs foreign influences with one that is fundamentalist and hostile to the outside world."[52] This becomes a fact with the implementation of the citizenship bill in terms of religion.

### 4.1. Challenge on the Citizen's Identity

India has historical plurality and modern plurality. Modern plurality is a continuation of the historical plurality but with certain incorporated factors. The historical plurality refers to the innumerable identities and religious diversities. It includes culture, language, and religions that have entered into this nation hundreds of years before. The modern plurality is formed because of globalization and by the emergence of sects among various religious traditions in India. They have been contributing to the development of the nation through educational institutions and their religiously driven moral directions, which results in peace and prosperity. However, the ideologies of Savarkar, Hedgewar, and Golwalkar are a direct blow to such religious traditions. I wonder why the then Indian government did not ban such writings, which is a challenge to the secular fabric of India. On the position of Muslims and Christians in the RSS India, Ram Punyani states, "both communities are seen as second-class citizens," because, unlike Hindus, "there is the distinction between motherland and religion."[53] Muslims' holy land may be different, but their nation is this (India) and they are not accepted in their holy land (Mecca). The nation India grew into today's stature by receiving directions and help from various religious traditions and people like the former president of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. It seems, "The imposition of a monolithic Hindu orthodox would undermine pluralism within the Hindu tradition itself."[54]

### 4.2. Creating Fear among the Majority Hindus

Mahatma Gandhi's murder was a practical exposition of the ideology of the RSS. The Savarkarian ideology of Hindutva stems from the feeling that the Hindus are weak compared to Muslims



and he considered Muslims as the first enemies, not British. More than 80% of Indian people are Hindus but still, they are portrayed as weak. In states like Kerala, where Christians and Muslims are a considerable population, the Hindu population lives peacefully but in North India where Hindus are more than 95%, projected as weak and fearful of minorities.

Moreover, it is obvious from the above description that the *Sangh Parivar* is propagating a fascist ideology. They are boastful of the 'supposed' past glory of the nation. Since 2014, blatant lies are being propagated as 'the truth' and the process of politicization of religion has forcefully been carried out. To achieve their proposed national agenda of segregating minorities, the projects like NRC and CAA have been enacted. This has created unrest in society, especially in the universities. The universities like JNU, Jamia Milia, Delhi, Aligarh University, have witnessed students' agitations. Large processions in many cities and states have powerfully echoed the need to secure India's secular constitution. As Savarkar's criterion, the qualification to be an Indian is to accept this land as the land of ancestors; unfortunately, the requirements in the NRC and CAA bills necessitate minorities to prove their lineage.

### 4.3. Method of Silence and Misleading Discourses

The silent approval of lynching incidences on the allegation of keeping beef and the attack on the age-old traditional job of selling meat are a planned strategy to break the financial security of the minorities. Creating fear and insecurity are part of the strategy. Such incidences need to be looked at from the *Hindutva* perspective and the followers are in the process of implementing it. The recent claim of the home minister Amit Shah in the Parliament that they have a majority and others have to listen to them echoes imperialism, which is quite profound in Golwalkarian thought.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill offers citizenship to the non-Muslim immigrants of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the name of a persecuted religious minority in these countries

who arrived in India on or before December 31, 2014. It has two meanings; immigrants who do not belong to the said countries are not considered, but thousands of immigrants who live without documentation are allowed to be a citizen of this nation.[55] What is disturbing is, citizenship will be given not based on human rights but the basis of religion. As the case is this, religious minorities who are persecuted in Srilanka and other nations are excluded. This can be taken as the first step to show that one particular community in India is not considered equal to the majority of Hindus.[56] The assertion is clear; India belongs to Hindus. This is underlined by the hate speech of many BJP linked political leaders asking Muslims to go to Pakistan and Christians to Rome. The enacted law can be the first step of upcoming disciplinary measures for India's minorities.

In the name of protecting minorities, the next step would be to check the minorities inside the nation. Then demarcate them different from the majority of Hindus. If *Hinduisation* is the aim, then India has a lot to learn from Pakistan; Pakistani scholar Ajazuddin has said, "We Pakistanis have paid a huge prize – violent conflicts, sectarianism, extremism, intolerance, and loss of rights and freedoms – because we allowed *Islamisation* of our state and society. If India wants to commit the same mistake by allowing its *Hinduisation*, the price we pay will be far higher."[57] By taking away the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir and by getting more control of the internal affairs, it becomes easier to implement *Hindutva* ideology. The sequence of events, such as withdrawing the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, the NRC bill in Assam, the Supreme Court's permission to construct Ram temple at Ayodhya, and the CAA echoes what can be the future of this nation.

## Conclusion

Freedom, equality, and separation of religion from the state are the essential qualities of a secular nation. However, the present political condition has taken the secular constitution to the brink.



Having a secular constitution but practicing what is against its tenets are quite precarious. If the Savarkarian, Hedgewarian, and Golwalkarian ideology is implemented, the nation will be divided in terms of religion, ethnicity, and even language. Vehement claims that Muslims, Christians, and communists are enemies, although they are here for centuries are ridiculous. Such a framework is against equality envisioned in the constitution. Attack on universities where liberal-secular scholars have produced points to the insidious agenda of the fascist ideology. In such a situation, only a mass awakening can change the fate of the nation. The deep-rooted fascist clutches need to be uprooted from the minds of many, for that, I feel, the Indian secularist minded society may have to indulge in a second freedom struggle. It is time to uphold the secular nature of the nation and understand our nationhood in terms of Secularism, not of *Hindutva*.

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## End Notes

1 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (V. D. Savarkar), known as Vir/Veer Savarkar by name was born on May 28, 1883, in Bhagur, India. He died on Feb. 26, 1966, in Bombay [now Mumbai]), after creating a large tumult in the history of Indian politics. He was a Hindu and Indian nationalist and leading figure in the Hindu Mahasabha (Great Society of Hindus), a Hindu nationalist organization and political party. While a student of law in London (1906–10), Savarkar helped to instruct a group of Indian revolutionaries in methods of sabotage and assassination that associates of his had learned from expatriate Russian revolutionaries in Paris. During this period he wrote The Indian War of Independence, 1857 (1909), in which he took the view that the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was the first expression of Indian mass rebellion against British colonial rule.

In March 1910 Savarkar was arrested on various charges relating to subversion and incitement to war and was sent to India for trial and convicted. In a second trial he was convicted of his alleged complicity in the assassination of a British district magistrate in India, and, after sentencing, he was transported to the Andaman Islands for detention "for life." He was brought back to India in 1921 and released from detention in 1924. While imprisoned he wrote Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu? (1923), coining the term Hindutva ("Hinduness"), which sought to define Indian culture as a manifestation of Hindu values; this concept grew to become a major tenet of Hindu nationalist ideology.

2 Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (M. S Golwalkar), fondly known as Guruji, was born on 19. February 1906 in Ramtek near Nagpur Maharashtra, was the second chief of RSS. He is famous for his ideology of Hindutva. He was the first person to use the concept of a religion-based nation naming Hindu Rashtra, which is considered, as the base for the two-nation theory. He died on 5, June 1973 after creating a turbulent history in the name of religion and politics. During his college days, he was incensed at the open advocacy of Christianity and the disparagement of Hinduism. He taught zoology at the Banaras Hindu University. Golwalkar's abilities in handling details of a large camp, public speaking, reading, and writing were greatly appreciated and his ability finally led him to achieve the chief position of the RSS in 1940. *We or Our Nationhood defined* is one of his famous writings in which he propagates about Hindu culture and its heritage for nation-building.

3 Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was the founding chief of RSS in Nagpur based on the idea of Hindutva. He was born on 1, April 1889 in Nagpur. He was expelled from the Neel City High School for singing Vande Mataram in violation of the circle produced by the then British government. He was influenced by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Savarkar's Hindutva. Though Hedgewar participated in the Indian National Congress anti-national approach from the Muslim community pushed him to take up a step for promoting the cultural and religious heritage of Hindus for nation-building.

4 Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 218–219.

5 Christopher Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Ranikhet Cantt: Permanent Black, 2016), 8.

6 Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, 8.

7 Ibid., 9.

8 Ibid., 10.

9 Ram Puniyani, *Indian Nationalism versus Hindu Nationalism* (Jamis Nagar: Pharos Media, 2016), 46–47.

10 Ibid., 47.

11 Garima Kapil, "Bal Gangadhar Tilak: India Nationalist, Teacher, Social Reformer, Lawyer, Activist," *Connected to India* (January 16, 2020), accessed January 16, 2020, https://www.connectedtoindia.com/bal-gangadhar-tilak-indian-nationalist-teacher-social-reformer-lawyer-activist-1075.html.

12 Rodinmawia Ralte, *And Hindutva: Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Extremism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism* (Taiwan: Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, 2014), 27.

13 Ibid., 28."publisher":"Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia","publisher-place":"Taiwan","title":"and Hindutva: Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Extremism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism","author":[{"family":"Ralte","given":"Rodinmawia"}],"issued":{"date-parts":[["2014"]]}},"locator":"28"}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 30.

16 Ibid., 31.

17 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: Hindu and Indian Nationalist," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, May 24, 2020), accessed August 23, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vinayak-Damodar-Savarkar.

18 Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, 15.

19 Ralte, *And Hindutva: Hindu Tolerance, Hindutva Extremism, Emergence of Assertive Hinduism*, 34.

20 Ibid., 35.

21 Janaki Bakhle, "Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of Essentials of Hindutva," *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (2010): 155.

22 Ibid., 153.

23 Ibid.

24 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Delhi: Hindu Sahitya Sadan, 2018), 18–19.



25 Bakhle, "Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of Essentials of Hindutva," 158.

26 Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*, 23–24.

27 Bakhle, "Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of Essentials of Hindutva," 160.

28 Ibid., 164.

29 Ibid., 177.

30 Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, 16.

31 Ibid., 34.

32 Puniyani, *Indian Nationalism versus Hindu Nationalism*, 14.

33 Ibid., 52. M. S. Golwalker succeeded Hedgewar in 1940

34 Cited in Ibid., 53.

35 Shamsul Islam, *Golwalker's We or Our Nationhood Defined: A Critique by Shamsul Islam with the Full Text of the Book* (New Delhi: Pharos Media and Publishing Pvt Ltd, 2018), 54–56. There were arguments about the authorship of the book. Shamsul Islam vehemently criticises the double mindedness of RSS. In one of the editions of Organiser in 1998, it is said that "We or Our Nationhood Defined" was written by B. S. Savarkar, the elder brother of Veer Savarkar; some others tried to appropriate this work with V. D. Savarkar's *Rashtra Meemansa*.

36 M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939), 4–27.

37 Ibid., 52–53.

38 Ibid., 8–9.

39 Ibid., 18.

40 Ibid., 37.

41 Ibid., 33.

42 Ibid., 21.

43 Ibid., 16–19.

44 Ibid., 22–23.

45 Ibid., 26–27.

46 Islam, *Golwalker's We or Our Nationhood Defined: A Critique by Shamsul Islam with the Full Text of the Book*, 19–20.

47 M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu, 1996), 36.

48 Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 63.

49 Ibid., 30.

50 Ibid., 35–36.

51 Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*, 5.

52 Puniyani, *Indian Nationalism versus Hindu Nationalism*, 12.

53 Ibid., 15.

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55 India Today Web Desk, "What Is Citizenshoip Amendment Bill: All You Need to Know about CAB," *India Today* (n.d.), accessed December 15, 2019, https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/jharkhand-assembly-election/story/voting-fourth-phase-jharkhand-assembly-poll-begins-1628546-2019-12-16.

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57 Ibid.

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# A Critical Appraisal of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Theological Method and its Application to the Revision of a Classical Concept of God

***Dr. Wandahilin Kharlukhi***

## Introduction

Rosemary Radford Ruether has been considered as one of the pioneers of Christian feminist theology. Her contributions to the field are exhibited in her books, articles, and reviews that she has written throughout her theological career. Among all of her writings, her classic *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* reflects a theology that is transformative and liberative. Ruether is considered to be both a systematic and a liberation theologian.[1] As a systematic feminist theologian, she develops a feminist theoretical framework to critique and reinterpret major dogmatic themes of Christian theology from the critical feminist perspective. As a liberation theologian, Ruether developed a theology by employing a structural strategy in its alignment with radical liberation movement, particularly with feminist liberation theology.

Ruether's theology is an inclusive theology. Although she makes use of women's experience of domination as the norm of her theological thinking, she affirms 'an inclusive humanity' that include genders, all social groups and races, as her critical principle. Thus, for Ruether, the struggle of women toward full humanity is paralleled with the struggle for full humanity of all oppressed groups. Commenting on this, Mary Hembrow Snyder says that for Ruether, the purpose of theology is not limited to

developing a specifically feminist consciousness, but to fostering compassionate commitment to liberation from all forms of bondage.[2] Taking this as her goal, Ruether develops a dialectic method for theology, which affirms that all aspects of reality are potentially and radically equal. The aim of this paper is to critically analyze the methodological tool utilized by Ruether, and to evaluate how she applied her method while revising the classical notion of the concept of God.

## I. Rosemary Radford Ruether's Theological Method

### *(a) The Dialectic Method*

As mentioned above, Ruether's theological methodology is a dialectical methodology. It is dialectical because "it seeks to be radical in such a way that the radical side is not just an "attack," but the critical word of the tradition itself to judge, transform, and renew it in new and more humanizing ways."[3] In her theology, Ruether ties together Christian tradition and reality in a dialectical rather than in a dualistic way. She rejects a dualistic or two-dimensional thinking on the basis that it reduces reality into either/or thinking, predicated on hierarchy of domination, and fosters the ideological deformation of reality that culminates in evil such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and militarism. Ruether believes that an "either/or" mentality has dominated the Western worldview, and therefore Christian tradition is built upon dichotomized concepts that are associated with gender dualism. For example, she suggests that a primary example of "either/or" thinking can be seen in the Christian dichotomization of spirit and matter. Furthermore, these dichotomized concepts are gendered, with the spirit associated with male and matter associated with the female.[4]

Against this thought, Ruether develops a dialectical theology because she argues that a dialectical thinking demands "…an exploration of repressed otherside and perspective in order to move beyond both poles to a new synthesis that can integrate both poles of the dualism."[5] She argues that within the dialectic thinking, polarities are explored in a mutually critical way, revealing new insights and synthesis that are unrealized. The best way to create a feminist spirituality, according to Ruether, is not by means of separatism and rejection, but by means of synthesis and transformation. She further concludes,[6]

> We need to work through, with great breadth and depth, what our actual experience has been both in the dominant culture shaped by males and in suppressed experiences of women. Then we can begin to put together a new synthesis that utilizes many of the elements of earlier traditions, but within a new and liberated context

To affirm her thought cited above Ruether further argues that healthy dialectic therefore, kept various tensions in harmonious balance, whereas a dualistic mode of perception of reality impedes a holistic theology of liberation and creates a world of alienation from which we seek liberation.[7]

Ruether identifies three movements of theological reflection that provides the dialectical process of her theology. Firstly, feminist theology begins critically. The theologian recalls how women have been oppressed not only by male-patriarchal society, but more importantly by an oppressive male-dominated church. Such critical engagement brings to light the sexism of traditional theology. Secondly, feminist theology seeks to recover alternative biblical and extra biblical traditions that present women in a positive light. Such traditions support woman's personhood, her equality in the image of God, her equal redeemability, her participation in prophecy, teaching and leadership. Thirdly, on the basis of such alternative traditions, the theologian then recasts traditional Christian categories, symbols and doctrines with a view toward the full personhood of women. These three 'movements' of theological reflection provide the dialectic process lying at the heart of Ruether's programme.[8]

## II. The Critical and Prophetic-Liberating Principles in Ruether's Dialectic Method

### *(a) The Critical Principle in Ruether's Dialectical Method*

The critical norm of Ruether's dialectic is the feminist critical principle and the prophetic principle. In *Sexism and God-Talk,* Ruether states the critical principle in her theology as "the promotion of the full humanity of women." This provides the norm by which she judges the sources of her theology to be revelatory or not. Therefore, for Ruether, whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is appraised as not redemptive and not from God. Conversely, whatever promotes the full humanity of women is redemptive, revelatory and of God.[9]

This critical principle is employed both in a negative and positive way, that is, it serves as an instrument to denounce certain theological positions and it is also a starting point of feminist theology. Ruether emphasizes that this critical principle is not new. The correlation of authentic human nature and fallen humanity is the basic structure of classical theology. However, the uniqueness of feminist theology is not the critical principle itself but the fact that women claim this principle for themselves and name themselves as subjects of authentic and full humanity.[10] Ruether describes "full humanity" as 'authentic being,' 'our original authentic human nature,' 'full human potential,' and as 'imago dei."[11] This principle of full humanity, according to Ruether therefore, suggests the need for an authentic message of redemption and includes the mission of redemptive community, which complies with the need of the free establishment of humanity as image of God.[12]

The principle of 'full humanity' serves as a tool for the redemption and re-establishment of humanity as '*imago dei,'* which in turn becomes the basic source for women's liberation. For Ruether, the redeeming of the image of God means realizing and fulfilling of women's capacities and



potentialities as human beings. But while engaging in the task of restoring full humanity to women and consider this as her central issue, Ruether failed to adequately address the equally important issue of sexual difference which is one of the most fundamental issues in feminist theology. Anne-Claire Mulder has clearly pointed this out. She says, "the universality of 'full humanity as a critical principle of feminist liberation theology leads her (Ruether) to dismiss any anthropologies in which the difference between men and women is maximaliized, arguing that this means a limitation of 'full humanity.'"[13]

To the issue of sexual differences, it is imperative that one has to articulate a theological reflection that emphasizes on the full humanity of women, while at the same time not minimizing the sexual nature of human being, so that the question of sexual differences, which is a human reality is also taken into account. With this, one can also pay attention to the question of equality of men and women given the reality of sexual differences. How do we define 'equality' here is crucial. It is important to note that the term 'equality' does not always refer to simple uniformity, in which men and women are equal without any 'difference.' To extend the meaning of the concept of equality one can speak of equality that is not reduced to a linguistic conceptual unrelated framework but rather of a dynamic and paradoxical equality that embodied distinction or contradictions with relation. A feminist theological method should guide feminist theologians to embrace this line of thought in their struggle for full humanity and equality.

Using her critical principle, Ruether approaches several sources, establishing a "useable tradition" for her feminist theology. These sources include: Scripture, Christian doctrine (heretical and orthodox), Pre-Christian Near Eastern Religion and philosophy, and critical post-Christian traditions (socialism, liberalism, and romanticism). For Ruether, all these traditions are sexist, but at the same time they can also be alternative

liberating sources for a feminist vision. The vision which she is speaking about is the, "equivalence and mutuality between men and women, between classes and races, between humanity and nature."[14] Furthermore, Ruether contends that none of these sources are pure, but together they offer alternative glimpses or intimations of what the full humanity of women looks like.[15] Therefore, they need to be corrected by feminist critical principle. Ruether also reiterates that feminist theology should claim the critical principles of every tradition, but the relation to these inherited traditions must be dialectical.[16]

### *(b) The Prophetic Principle in Ruether's Dialectic Method*

The prophetic norm in Ruether's dialectic is exemplified by the Hebrew prophets. Ruether constantly correlates the "prophetic principle of Christianity" and the "critical principle of feminism." Methodologically, she turns feminist theology into an ideological critique, unveiling the distortions of Christian symbols through positing of a prophetic principle. The prophetic principle[17] is taken from biblical resources. Patriarchy is the social context for both the OT and the NT. But, both have resources for critiques of patriarchy. Here, patriarchal ideology loses its normative character. Feminist readings of the bible can discern a norm within biblical faith by which the biblical text can be criticized. What is innovative in feminist hermeneutics is not the prophetic norm but rather feminist appropriation of this norm for women. Once the prophetic norm is asserted as central to biblical faith, patriarchy can no longer be authoritative.[18]

Ruether outlines four themes that are essential to the prophetic-liberating tradition of Biblical faith. She argues that prophetic tradition as well as Jesus' mission in the gospel includes themes such as God's vindication of the oppressed, critique of the dominant system, the vision of the coming reign of God, and finally the critique of ideology or of religion. Prophetic faith denounces religious ideologies and systems that sacralize unjust



privilege, and that justify the dominant, unjust social structure that ignore the needs of the people.[19]

Ruether applies this prophetic-liberating principle to critique sexism for the liberation of women. For her, feminist theologians have the task to reappropriate, rediscover, and reinterpret the prophetic message that has been neglected by the main stream theology. Through this prophetic-liberating principle, feminist theology brings to light what was overlooked in male advocacy of the poor and the oppressed. For Ruether, liberation must start "with the oppressed, namely women. This means that the critique of hierarchy must become explicitly a critique of patriarchy. All liberating prophetic visions must be deepened and transformed to include what was not included: women."[20]

While Ruether's prophetic-liberating principle serves as a method to correct the deformation of distorted doctrines, symbols, and principles, it is also subject to criticism. Rebecca Chopp argues that the methodological construction in the prophetic-liberating tradition of the biblical faith itself is a problem, although it turns Christian theology into an ideological critique that successfully raises consciousness. For Chopp, the problem of this method lies in its failure to give an account of the historical accuracy and in its inability to identify the already existing practices of subversion and transformation. Interestingly, Chopp states the problem of this method and critically asks,[21]

> Is such a thing as the prophetic-liberating tradition not abstract formulation of Christianity, a formulation that prevents a thick description of Christian practices showing the relation of power, language, institutions, and subjectivity? Does not such an iconoclastic critique as given by the prophetic-liberating tradition force us into either the position of a negative dialectics (always saying "no") or a paradoxical dialectics (always assuming that behind the deformations of existence experience is somehow secured, authentic or

real)? Does such a weight of "truth" on the prophetic-liberating tradition overlook the pleasure as well as pain that women had in the daily practices of Christianity?

Chopp's criticism above is tenable because although prophetic-liberating principle can provide the framework to critique patriarchy, it can at best serve as a method for raising consciousness by retrieving and reinterpreting liberative prophetic traditions for women that has been ignored in mainstream Christian theology. Going along the same line of argument, it is fundamental that feminists adopt a methodological framework that not only provides the space for critique of patriarchy through propheting-liberating principle. Rather, in critiquing patriarchy feminists theologians have to use and engage in a thick hermeneutical description of the *kyriocentric* text that goes beyond the surface of the meaning of the text by analyzing and unfolding the androcentric language of the text, ideological-rhetorical aims of the narrative, and the context and web of social relationships in the everyday life of women.

## III. Ruther's Method of Critical Principle and Women's Experience

The norm, sources and hermeneutic are incorporated into Ruether's theological method which, as mentioned above, is described as dialectical. The hermeneutical starting point from which Ruether interprets these sources and retrieves a useable tradition is "women's experience" that constitutes her methodology. Ruether declares this to be the unique aspect of feminist theology, in that it draws upon women's experience which has been silenced within the Christian tradition. As indicated in her *Sexism and God-Talk,* she uses her method based on an appeal to women's experience in which she says, "explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based in male experience rather than on universal human experience."[22]



Ruther's method of critical principle for the promotion of full humanity of women and an appeal to women's experience has also been severely contested. Chopp contends that the humanist method used by Ruether indicates certain limitations. The term "full humanity" according to her, precipitates a kind of detachment from our concrete, real, historical experience. The humanist method, with its belief in its metahistorical structure, fails to explain women's complicity with patriarchy.[23] It suppresses the reality of differences and does not offer space for new visions, attitudes, and practices of transformation. Within this methodological framework the richness and openness to different culture, language, and voices are denied and limited. Thus to Chopp, Ruether's critical principle of "full humanity" ultimately turns into an abstract principle which should be avoided so that different human beings as they are and as they become may be discovered and enhanced.[24]

The use of "women's experience" as norm of feminist theology that constitutes feminist theological method has also been questioned by feminist theologians, especially by third world feminist theologians, like Kwok Pui-lan. These theologians claim that feminist theology has always been formulated from the perspective of the white middle class experience, while the experience of the marginalized women are not reflected and accounted. Hence, they acknowledged the reality of multiple and diversity of women's experience, and are critical about making women's experience as a sure foundation for doing theology. Besides this, they also critiqued the method of essentializing women's experience and criticized the pioneers of feminist theology for talking about women's experience in a singular and generalized manner.[25] Main questions that emerge from this are: Is women's experience normative? Who represents whom in feminist theology? Who define the category of experience? Whose experience is reflected? Is there anything that can be called a universal experience? How to theorize women's experience?

Feminists' use of "women experience" for constructing her feminist theology is also questioned and challenged by poststructuralist theologian, Mary McClintock Fulkerson. Fulkerson questions the feminist norm of "women's experience" for criticizing both theology and practice. She said that feminist theology has thus far been an experience-based theology, positing a feminist experience of oppression as a normative code by which one could assess women's status in any given society. She demonstrates, however, that an experience-based theology, even a liberatory one, that expands its subject positions to include the diverse experiences of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference, is inadequate to the task of explaining the difference.[26] For Fulkerson, therefore, feminist theology should change its subject from some general idea of "women," that is meant to but cannot represent the experience of all women, to a notion of identities, produced in different location. By making this move, Fulkerson believes that it is possible to recognize how women's experience and resistance to oppression takes shape in particular location. This move engenders a feminist theology of production rather than of representation. It serves as a theory that adequately accounts for women's experience in different social location.[27]

What is interesting in Fulkerson's theology is that she develops a feminist framework that theorizes the 'difference' as opposed to the monolithic gender category of the pioneers of feminist theology like Mary Daly, Ruether and others. First, Fulkerson moves beyond mere ideological critique of Ruether. Second, she moves beyond 'essentializing women's experience and gender category' and pays attention to the dominant method, power and language system.

## IV. The Application of Ruether's Theological Method to Reconstruct the Image of God

The dualistic model for understanding God has strongly dominated and influenced Western Christian theology for centuries. The emergence of feminist theology for about half of the century poses a challenge to this dualistic approach for God. Feminist theologians argue that the understanding of God in Western theology has been determined by male-centered dualistic approach. It is not surprising, therefore, that feminist writer, like Naomi Goldenberg concludes that the study of theology is the study of "an exclusively male God."[28] This understanding has led some feminists to develop the term "thealogia," which means the study of the Goddess. According to them, 'Thealogia' is an alternative female-centered model for understanding God that provides an important model for understanding the way in which theological language is used. It is also a holistic approach to the concept of God.[29] Although Ruether does not explicitly use this term, she attempts to develop a feminist theology that also reflect the importance of constructing an alternative concept of God for women. Thus, a revision of the classical notion of God is significant for Ruether. In the following section therefore the attempt is to analyze Ruether's application of the dialectical method to reconstruct and revise the concept of God. But before we dwell on this particular issue, we will first highlight briefly the problem of the patriarchal language for God that serves as a background to understand why this language for God needs to be revised.

## V. The Problem of the Patriarchal Language of God

According to Ruether, the inclusive language for God has become a controversial issue in contemporary religious life.[30] Problems started when feminist theologians began to take seriously their experience of alienation based on this male image of God. Mary Daly, a radical feminist theologian who counteracted the use of patriarchal language that excludes women experience, strongly concluded with the view that "if God is male, then the male is God."[31] Such a radical view stems from the problem of misusing and distorting the language about God. Ruether does not incorporate the same line of argument with Daly, but she argues against the proposition that inclusive language is trivial and

unimportant and says that the issue cannot as well be treated as an accidental question of linguistics. The patriarchal language of God emerged from the patriarchal societies where the ideologies belong to the dominant social order, and religion is the handmaiden of the ruling class. In all those patriarchal societies that follow a male monotheist religion, God's image serves as the central re-enforcement of the structure of patriarchal rule.[32]

According to Ruether, male monotheism becomes the vehicle of a psychocultural revolution of the male ruling class in its relationship to surrounding reality. She observes that in ancient myth, Gods and Goddesses are seen within the matrix of one physical-spiritual reality, but male monotheism begins to split reality into dualism of transcendent Spirit (mind, ego), and an inferior and dependent physical nature. In this split the male is seen essentially as the image of the male transcendent God and the female is seen as the image of the lower material nature. Gender becomes the primary symbol for the dualism of transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter.[33] Thus, for Ruether, it is the male monotheism that reinforces gender hierarchy of patriarchal rule, through its religious system in a way that was not the case with the paired images of Gods and Goddess.[34] This has led to a belief that only male can represent God, while female is connected to God only secondarily through male. To correct this patriarchal conception of God that dehumanizes and marginalizes one section of humanity, Ruether attempts to reconstruct and revise the classical conception and language of God using her dialectic method.

## VI. The Transcendent-Immanent God in Ruether's Theology

One of Ruether's primary goals is to discover a nondualistic model of God. Christian theology has created a dichotomy of spirit and matter, mind and body, male and female, and immanent and transcendent. This dichotomization of reality is the first that Ruether rejects in her view of God. For her, the radical



disassociation of spirit/transcendence and matter/immanence presents a God who is removed from humanity and creation. Ruether argues that in Hebrew thought God has been elevated above the creation God makes. The relation of God to humans and to the whole creation is that "of an artisan shaping an object outside Godself."[35] This means that God is distinct and not part of the world, but rather positions Godself outside and rules over creation as Lord. As a response to this proposition, Ruether advocates a dialectical view of immanence-transcendence, affirming both the nearness and the otherness of God. She also argues that the association with maleness and transcendence leads to an idolatrous overemphasis on male imagery for God; she critiques the dominance of male language and imagery for God and argues that we need to retrieve and create female imagery in light of women's experiences.

While retaining the idea of the transcendence of God, Ruther also speaks of the immanent God. Her emphasis on the understanding of God as the primal matrix affirms the immanence of God. Ruether speaks of the image of the divine as the Primal Matrix of matter and energy, the womb within which all things are generated. This idea of God as the "Primal Matrix" resonates Tillich's concept of God as the "Ground of Being" Here, Tillich's 'Ground of Being' is equivalent to Ruether's 'Primal Matrix' or to cite her most widely known term God/ess, the only difference of which she gives it a more feminine cast."[36] For Ruether, matter/energy is the common essence of all nature; every creature and creation is part of this living matrix and partakes of God.[37] This understanding of God as divine matrix has never entirely disappeared from human religious imagination. It survives in the metaphor of the divine as the Ground of Being.

For Ruether, therefore, God is never only a "transcendent God" but also an "immanent God," because she holds that, "God is not "up there" as an abstract ego, but beneath and around the world as encompassing source of life.[38] With this view of God,

spirit and matter are not split hierarchically. Thus, she says, "God is not a 'being' removed from creation, ruling it from outside in a manner of a patriarchal ruler; God is the source of being that underlies creation and ground its nature and future potential for the continual transformative renewal in biophilic mutuality."[39] Ruether contends that the dialectic of a transcendent-immanent God provides an image that will overcome dualism embedded in the Christian tradition. But how Ruether adequately maintain the balance between the immanence and the transcendence of God remains a question that needs to be explored further.

Dwelling on the theology of an immanent God, Miriam S. Starhawk in her *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* defines the three principles of 'earth-based spirituality' as 'immanence', 'interconnectedness' and 'community.' She speaks of the immanent God of the Goddess religion that is distinguished from the 'transcendent' God that characterizes traditional Christian and some forms of traditional Jewish spirituality. For Starhawk, the appeal of the symbol of Goddess is that it tells us that this earth is the location in which the divine presence is found in the earth-body and woman's own body.[40] This thought of the divine presence in women's own bodies is also found in Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk*. Here, Ruether speaks about the immanent 'mother Goddess' of radical feminists who worship the earth, and reinforces this by her identification of God/ess with the liberated self of the feminist woman. To conclude, Ruther in her own words contends, "the liberating encounter with God/ess is always an encounter with our (women's) authentic selves resurrected from underneath the alienated self."[41]

## VII. The Retrieval of Feminine Images of God in the Goddess Tradition

Ruether's critical dialectics is also at work is her naming of the divine. She begins by retrieving those elements of the Ancient Near Eastern traditions that were suppressed by the monotheistic religions like Jewish and Christian religions.



While it suppressed the feminine images, the biblical tradition nevertheless understands God as liberating and sovereign. Scripture enriches our understanding of the divine with female images and metaphors. But these liberating images, according to Ruether, are suppressed by patriarchal religious system which emphasized on the male dominating image of God.[42] Ruether attempts to counteract the whole story of this male dominating image by bringing out some feminine images of God parallel to male images, as they appeared in the Scriptural and theological traditions.[43] She says, "God is not always described as a male, but God is also spoken of as a female."[44] The text from Isaiah (Isaiah 42:13-14, 49:14-15) is an appropriate text that revealed the feminine image of God. The description of God as mother or like a woman in travail with the birth of a child, the unconditional love of the mother toward the child are a remarkable example of human speech about the feminine attributes of God that are more than what is discovered in male activity.[45]

It is interesting to note that this image of God as 'mother' is also found in Elizabeth A Johnson's reconstruction of the doctrine of God. To reconstruct the classical image of God, Johnson also appropriates the title 'mother' for God and connect woman's womb with the mercy of God. This connection between the womb and the mercy of God, Johnson thinks, are reasons to maintain the biblical references to God who loves as a mother. For Johnson, the naming of female imagery is not used in contradiction to the patriarchal image of God. Rather, it is used in order to evoke the 'whole' of the mystery of God.[46] In this way, she was able to insert new thinking and new ideas to the traditional doctrine of God in a manner that is meaningful and inclusive of women.

A radical re-imagination of the classical doctrine of God in feminist theological is also developed by Sallie McFague. In her metaphorical theology, McFague's image of 'mother' is also her preferred metaphorical image for God. Here, she wishes to draw attention to the power of maternal image as life-giving:[47]

> It is from [the physical act of giving birth] that the model derives its power, for here it joins the reservoir of the great symbols of life and of life's continuity: blood, water, breath, sex and food. In the acts of conception, gestation, and birth all are involved, and it is therefore no surprise that these symbols became the center of most religions, including Christianity, for they have the power to express the renewal and transformation of life—the "second birth"—because they are the basis of our "first birth." And yet, at least in Christianity, alienated as it always has been from female sexuality, has been willing to accept the second, "spiritual," renewal of existence in the birth metaphor, but not the first, "physical," coming into existence.

While emphasizing on the power of maternal image, McFague also reiterates that acceptance of the model of God as "mother" need not be a sentimental affair, McFague argues. The maternal God is also the "judge," the one who "establishes justice" and promotes an ethic of "care." Based on this, we can conclude that McFague did not completely rule out any talk of God as "father," but rather seeks to destabilize the oppressive dimensions of that model by shifting attention onto the maternal "bodiliness" of God's relation to the world.[48] This is a sound theological argument for the naming of the female image of God should not be an attempt to cancel or contradict the patriarchal image of God, but rather to evoke the whole mystery of God, as Johnson concluded.

Another female image of God depicted in the scripture is *Sophia* or Wisdom image. The sources are drawn from Wisdom tradition where the female image appears as a second persona of God who mediates the work of creation or who is portrayed as being at the heart of the creative act. Wisdom is the subtle power of the presence of God, permeating and inspiriting all things (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26).[49] Ruether also discovered



the powerful image of divine Wisdom in the Goddess of the Ancient Near East, *Isis* or *Astarte*, who were imaged as creators and redeemers. They are connected with the wisdom of social justice, harmony in nature over and against the threatened power of chaos.[50]

According to Ruether, the *Sophia* image or the Wisdom image of God disappeared at the beginning of the Christian era on account of its use in Gnosticism. With the disappearing of Sophia in the Christian tradition, there emerged a new image of God known as *Shekinah. Shekinah*, is the female personification of God. She is described as God's mediating presence with Israel, a reconciler between God as father and creation. The people of Israel, even during their exile, experience her continuous guidance and presence. The exile is an alienation and division within God, between his transcendence and his immanence, or his male and female sides. When God embraced his/her own S*hekinah*, he/she also embrace and unite the male and female side and ultimately God becomes 'whole' transcending such division and alienation.[51]

While arguing that the appropriation model is important for an inclusive theology, Ruether also warns against the danger of making the feminine side of God a secondary principle as this prevents women from representing the divine in all its fullness. She asserts that a feminist appropriation of the feminine side of God within the patriarchal gender hierarchy is still a limited approach. It reinforces the problem of gender stereotyping on the level of God's language. This may have an effect that is far from liberating and egalitarian.[52] She therefore suggests that we need to go beyond the idea of appropriation of the 'feminine side of God' to a reconstruction of God's image that reflects male-female equality. In relation to this, McFague also corroborates Ruther's argument and cautions about the dangers of merely storing up oppressive cultural stereotypes by importing the so-called "feminine" into the Divine. She, therefore, preferred to name God as metaphorically "female" rather than as a "feminine."[53]

Ruether argues that in order to reconstruct the liberating image of God, these Goddess images should be dialectically incorporated in our view of God. This does not mean that Ruether wanted to replace the personal God of the Christian tradition. The appropriation of the Goddess into our theological reflection provides a template where dynamic unity of all realities is realized, and that all dualities are embraced. This view of Ruether is severely criticized. Critics say such view may fall into pure monism or result in pagan worship and veneration of the earth.[54]

## VIII. Revisioning of God language: Towards an Image of God Beyond Patriarchy

Since the appropriation model is not an adequate model for a feminist reconstruction of the divine, Ruether attempts to reconstruct an image for God that transcends the androcentric image. In relation to this she asserts, "we need to create transformative metaphors for God that gives both men and women the sense of their holistic potential and don't just duplicate gender stereotypes on the divine level."[55] She therefore proposes an equivalent image for God as both male and female. Here again, Ruether's dialectic is at work. God is conceptualized as both male and female without any subordination of the female symbol to the male symbol. The metaphor for God is equally drawn from female as well as male activity, mothering as well as fathering.[56]

The "full humanity" of women which is Ruether's critical principle is a constant theme of her explication of the language of God. The language of God as male and female is a creative metaphor that puts an end to the conventional patriarchal stereotype. It becomes the source from which "full humanity" wells up in both genders. The realization of the new humanity, new forms of relationship, are fulfilled only if God is realized to be both male and female. Ruether mentions that it is only within this expanding language of God that one discovers and develops one's full human potential as selves, as social beings, that have remain truncated and confined in patriarchal, hierarchical relationship.[57]



Interestingly, Ruether's critical dialectic has also challenged her to use the unpronounceable and inadequate symbol of God/ess,[58] a symbol which combines both male and female form of words for the divine. For Ruether, the unnameable understanding of the divine is used in order to transcend patriarchal limitation and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men.[59]

There is no doubt that Ruether's attempt to speak of God/ess, in both male and female terms, serves as a corrective to the traditional and patriarchal understanding of God/ess. Ruether's idea of God/ess expressed in true dialectic framework provides a wholistic understanding of the Reality that is experienced in both men and women. However, while holding that this framework is important and necessary, it also raises few crucial questions as to whether this proposed equivalent image of God/ess can solve the problem of domination of one gender over the other and whether such language for God can instead lead to the creation of two competing equals or binaries. But on the whole it is fair to conclude that Ruther's attempt to reshape and scrutinize the language of God goes beyond the purpose of eliminating the subordination of female to male as well as beyond rigid binaries.

Ruether's proposal of language for God as male and female to challenge the excessive androcentric representation in Christian tradition is significant because it calls for an experience of human fullness and divine mystery. But at the same time we have to understand that human language to understand the divine is still limited. All language for God is symbolical because God can only be construed partially. God language cannot also be reduced to human language. But in our human attempt to understand God we must, as Ruether says, "find the words that transform, not the words that deform, the words that heal, not the words that harm,"[60] although we know that human language and words cannot fully express the reality and being of God.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the theological method of Ruether, and have attempted to analyze how she makes use of her methodology while revising and reconstructing the understanding of the concept of God. It is interesting to note that while doing this, Ruether has creatively developed a dialectical framework that overcome Western dualistic thinking that divide and separate realities, and impacted the way we understand God-human-world relationship. Her theology is a pluralistic theology, in the sense that it reaches out to a wide-ranging of sources other than Christian resources. The appropriation model that is constitutive of her methodology provides space for myriad ways of naming God and for developing male and female or non-gendered language for God. This has enabled her to undercut patriarchal authority and to develop a feminist theology for the liberation of women. Overall, the imaginative and constructive aspect of Ruether's thought is evident in the way she constructs a methodological dialectical framework that makes it possible to bring the past into dialogue with the contemporary questions. Hence, her theology is no doubt a theology that is inclusive of all cultures and people as well as both genders.

## End Notes

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4 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 16-20. also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 29.

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8 Rosemary Redford Ruether, "The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy" in *Journal of the American Journal of Religion*, 53, no. 4, (December, 1985), 706-709.

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10 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 19.

11 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 93.

12 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 93.

13 Anne-Claire Mulder, "Thinking about the *Imago Dei*—Minimalizing or Maximalizing the Difference Between the Sexes: A Critical Reading of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Anthropology Through the Lens of Luce Irigaray's Thought" in *Feminist Theology* 14, (January, 1997), 31.

14 Ann-Claire, "Thinking about the *Imago Dei"*, 22.

15 Ann-Claire, "Thinking about the *Imago Dei*", 22.

16 Ruether, "Asking the Existential Questions", 378.

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19 Ruether. "Asking the Existential Questions", 24, also Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Prophetic Tradition and the Liberation of Women: Promise and Betrayal" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* (December, 1990): 24.

20 Ruether, "Asking the Existential Questions", 32.

21 Rebecca Chopp, "Seeing and Naming the World Anew: The Works of Rosemary Radford Ruether" in *Religious Studies Review* 15, no.1, January (1989): 11.

22 Ruether, *Sexism and God*-Talk, 13.

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27 Fulkerson, C*hanging the Subject*, 11.

28 Naomi Goldenberg, "The Return of the Goddess" quoted in Beverley Clack, "The Denial of Dualism: Theological Reflection on the Sexual and the Spiritual" Theological Reflections on Sexual and Spiritual" in *Feminist Theology* no. 10, September (1995), 103.

29 Clack, "The Denial of Dualism," 103.

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32 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Female Nature of God: A Problem in Contemporary Religious Life" in *Concilium* no. 143, (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 61.

33 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 54.

34 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 53. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Revisioning of God-Language," in *A Reader in Feminist Theology* ed. Prasanna Kumari (Madras, India: Gurukul Publication, 1993), 19.

35 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 76.

36 Ruther, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 71. For arguments on this see also ED. L Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 170-71.

37 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Dualism and the Nature of Evil in Feminist Theology" in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5:1 (1992), 35.

38 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 49.

39 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 223.

40 For a detailed study of this see Simos M. Starhawk. *The Spiral Dance: a Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco, CA.: HarperSanfrancisco, 1999), See also Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1997), xv.

41 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 116.

42 Beverly Clack also affirms this. She says that the Goddess is repressed in theological language just as women are oppressed in patriarchal society. See Beverly Clack, "The Denial of Dualism," 110.

43 Ibid, 52. also Ruether, "The Image of God's Goodness," 30.

44 Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Revisioning of God Language," 62, 66.



45 Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Revisioning of God Language," 62, 66. The description of God as "mother" and "woman" is also cited by biblical feminist theologian Phyllis Trible. For a detail description of this see Phyllis Trible, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies" in *Feminist Theology: A Reader* ed. Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1990), 25.

46 Elizabeth A Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* ((New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 56.

47 Sally, McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 52.

48 McFague, *Models of God*, 52.

49 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 57. Outstanding biblical feminist theologians like Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Elizabeth A Johnson have also elaborately describes the Sophia image of God. See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: SCM Press, 1983), 140-144, Johnson, Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 87-90.

50 Ruether, "The Female Nature of God," 62. James Dunn also speaks of *Sophia,* the female symbol of God. He argues that *Sophia's* functional equivalence with Yahweh requires that she be interpreted as a powerful female symbol of this one God. Thus to say that *Sophia* is the fashioner of all things, that she delivered Israel from a nation of oppressors, or that her gifts are justice and life is to speak of the transcendent God's relation to the world, of divine nearness and activity and summons. The Wisdom of God in late Jewish thought is simply God, revealing and known. See James Dunn in "Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982), 319-20.

51 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk,* 58.

52 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 61.

53 McFague, *Models of God*, 55.

54 E. D. L. Miller and Stanley J. Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*, 171.

55 Ruether, "The Image of God's Goodness," 31.

56 Ruether, "The Image of God's Goodness," 31.

57 Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Revisioning of God-Language," 30.

58 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 46.

59 Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 46.

60 Ruether, "The Image of God's Goodness," 31.

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# Book Review

**Yisu Das:** Witness of A Convert
By: Ravi Tiwari; ISPCK, Delhi, 2000, pp., 278, Price Rs. 1

The book under review is an attempt to present the struggles in living the new found faith of Badri Prasad Tiwari, known as Yisu Das Tiwari after his baptism and joining the Christian community. The book is written by Yisu Das Tiwarri's son Ravi Tiwari. Dr. Ravi Tiwari is a retired professor of Religion and Philosophy and a theological educator. Presently he lives in Lucknow, U.P.

'Conversion' is an experience. The term can be applied in both a 'religious' and a 'secular' sense. In the religious context conversion is a personal 'spiritual' experience that leads the individual to a personal encounter of the Divine. This experience, anubhava, inevitably leads the person to embrace the religious tradition which led him/her to the 'Conversion' experience. The depth of such a religious-spiritual experience cannot be described in words. It is anirvachaniya, indescribable. This religious-spiritual anubhava, experience, is unique and, as such, very 'personal.' It differs from person to person. It may or may not involve a 'darshana', 'vision', glimpse of the Divine.

The character, content and nature of a spiritual 'conversion', experience, darshana, anubhava, is not only unique and indescribable but also non-repeatable. Apostle Paul's religious-spiritual conversion experience on the road to Demascus was unique to him. So was with Sadhu Sundar Singh, Narayan Vaman Tilak and others. It wasalso a unique experience for Badri Prasad Tiwari. After his conversion Tiwari took Baptism and become a member of the Christian community. He then adopted the name



Yisu Das. Unfortunately, we hardly know of any auto-biography or biography of an untouchable who some view as a pariah.

'epistrepho', the Greek term means to 'turnabout.' In religious terms it couldmean a decision to turn around and join another religious tradition of one's choice. Aperson who undergoes the experience of 'epistrepho' decides to live a 'new' life, have a new value system inevitably leaves his/her 'old' self, religious tradition, value system and theology. People look at him/her as a new or a converted person. In religious terms, 'epistrepho' is a 'conversion experience', 'anubhava'. It is in this sense of 'epistrepho' that the readers are asked to understand and appreciate the conversion experience of Yisu Das. 'Metanoia', another Greek term, means 'to repent', a 'change of mind/heart' is used by some. Ravi seems to have preferred the term 'metanoia' (pp. 225).

Yisu Das was born as Badri Prasad in a Brahminic Hindu religious family. His father was a "staunch advaitin" and his mother a "devout Vaishnava." As a teenager he was influenced by the teachings of Swami Dayanand. His criticisms of orthodox Hinduism, Islam and Christianity attracted him most. In school Badri Prasad did not like a Christian teacher who always criticized Hindu religion. It angered him much. But his mother's teaching that "religion consists not in disputation but in prayer, in fasting and in doing tapasya." (p. 2) Badri followed this principle all through his life.

The book offers the reader a glimpse into the life and work, and the theological and spiritual struggles of Yisu Das Tiwari. The book also includes his reflections on chapters 14-17 of St. John's Gospel. The book contains 21 chapters divided into six sections. Section 1, 'Autobiographical writings' contains 1-4 chapters; Section 2, 'Spiritual Journey Through Johannine Studies' contains 5-8 chapters which are important to understand the spiritual struggles and faith responses to the social, cultural and spiritual challenges Yisu Das faced. Sections 1 & 2, containing chapters 1-8 are written by Yisu Das Tiwari. Section 3, 'Biographical'

contains chapter 9 titled "My Father" by Ravi Tiwari. It gives a glimpse into the life-history of Yisu Das. Section 4, contains 'Tributes', to Yisu Das Tiwari from his friends and colleagues on his passing away. Section 5, 'Theology of a Convert' by Ravi Tiwari and Section 6, Appendices.

Section 5, titled 'Theology of a Convert', is an important chapter. The author not only presents the theology of Yisu Das, the convert, but also discusses the meaning of the term 'Convert' in Hindu and Indian context. Yisu Das had studied Upanishads in Sanskrit and Adviata Vedanta of Samkara in original and also earned a Master's degree in Hindi language. He translated the Hindi New Testament in "Sanskritized vocabulary but not Sanskrit philosophical terms." (pp. 229) Yisu Das, expressed his faith in Jesus Christ, whom he called his "Ishta Devata", "through his life and, less with words." (pp. 231) In interpreting a text he applied the method of "shravana, manana, and nidhyasana, study, reflection and contemplation." (pp. 230) In a way Yisu Das worked out his own salvation through 'sadhana.' His goal, aim of life, 'purushartha' was to "have Brahma-Sakshatkara and Brhama nubhava, the realization of Christ-tattva." (pp. 231) His Christ-anubhava is very much evident in his commentary on the Gospel of Saint John especially on the Farewell discourses.Yisu Das called these chapters 'Upanishad' and 'Christ Geeta.' He translated the Greek New Testament into chaste Hindi under the aegis of Bible Society of India a unique contribution to the Hindi speaking Christian and Hindu communities.

While reflecting on the theology of a 'Convert', the author observes that the Indian Christian theology, by and large, is a slave of Western-European method of theologizing. He rightly asks the question that if Thomas Aquinas could apply Aristotle's philosophical methodology and tools in developing his own theology what hinders theIndian Christian theologians develop "epistemology, methodological and theological tools to produce Christian theology in Indian context" (pp. 224).



Ravi Tiwari has done well in presenting the life, conversion experience, struggles, and theology of his father, a Christian Bhakta, devotee, of Christ. Ravi, despite his other responsibilities, managed to motivate his father to share his life-experiences both before and after his Christ-anubhava, darshana that made him decide to follow Christ. Yisu Das did not write much. He made notes of and scribbled his meandering theological-philosophical thoughts and reflections and commentaries on the Gospel of Saint John on note books. His son, Ravi Tiwari, worked hard on his father's note book, in order to present them in the form of a book.

The theological institutions will do well to include a compulsory course in the Theology of Indian Converts to Christianity. Such an attempt will certainly help our theological students to interpret the Gospel of Jesus, the Christ in the Indian religious-theological and philosophical and cultural context.

Reviewed by:
**Satish C. Gyan**

## Contributors Details

A. Dias Rajasekaran is an M.Th graduate of North India Institute of Postgraduate Theological Studies in the department of New Testament comes from Tamil Nadu and he belongs to Evangelical Church of India.

Rev Palash Day is an ordained minister of Church of North India and he comes from West Bengal.

Neisabeinuo Sopfii is an M.Th graduate from North India Institute of Post graduate Theological Studies in the department of New Testament and she comes from Nagaland.

Vinod Shemron S is an M Th graduate from North India Institute of Post graduate Theological Studies in the department of Christian Theology and he belongs to Church of South India - Karnataka, Central Diocese.

Alan Varghese is a doctoral student of North India Institute of Postgraduate Theological Studies in the department of Religions and he comes from Pentecostal Church, Kerala.

Dr. Wandahilin Kharlukhi is an associate professor of Faculty of Theology, Serampore College in the department of Christian Theology.